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# THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES B. BAYNARD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE TWO SPIES.

ON the following Monday morning, a mysterious brown paper parcel was left at Mr. Holland's house, and with it a letter addressed to the minister, in Mr. Flint's handwriting. The parcel contained the manifesto; but before giving his attention to that, Mr. Holland read the deacon's letter. It stated that, in forwarding the requisition, as he had been requested to do, Mr. Flint could not forbear expressing a hope that the minister would see it to be his duty to resign, as there was no doubt

in his (the writer's) mind that it would be the better for his (Mr. Holland's) reputation to do so. Mr. Flint might not approve of all that had been said or done by others, who were probably deserving of blame as well as the minister; "but," said the deacon, "facts being as they are, I see no other course open to us and to you, than the one indicated." The writer concluded with a polite request that Mr. Holland would send him a written reply, not later than a week from that date.

The minister then read the requisition itself, which was the same in substance as that Mr. Staggers had prepared, and read at the conference in his sitting-room; but the deacon's saponaceous cousin had added a few phrases with the view of softening down its asperity. Appended to it were about forty signatures, the first, of course, being that of Larberry. Besides those who had signed at the meeting, Mrs. Copperfox, Mrs. Albert Winstock, Mr. Todd and his family, and a few other persons, were signatories.

"Not a very large number," Mr. Holland said to his wife, "considering the time and trouble taken in obtaining them."

"And considering *how* some of them were procured," added Kate, who was looking over his shoulder at the document. "Some of the poor people were, in a manner, forced to sign it, either by Amos Flint or Jael Staggers."

"So I have heard," said the minister.

"And those very people," continued his wife, "have told me, with tears in their eyes, that they have never ceased regretting that they yielded to them."

"Others were misled by seeing Laspberry's name attached to it, no doubt," said the minister, and taking the requisition from the table, and holding it at arm's length, he surveyed it with an interest similar to that with which one might regard a spent bullet that had been aimed at one's heart.

"This dread manifesto, which was to have inspired us with so much terror, has not overwhelmed us, after all," he said quietly.

Old Silas Winstock had invited the minister and his wife to take tea with him that afternoon ; and to him, at his table in the house at High Street, Mr. Holland, after mentioning that he had received the requisition, put the question—“ What must I do now ? ” He smiled as he said it, for he guessed what reply would be given. The minister was a very frequent guest at Mr. Winstock’s house, and there was no man in Oxbury to whom he talked with less reserve. He and the old miller understood each other, and got on together exceedingly well. Therefore Mr. Holland smiled as he said : “ What would you advise me to do, now I have received the requisition ? ”

“ Do ? ” said the old man dryly, “ frame it, and hang it up in your room as a curiosity.”

The minister smiled again.

“ That’s what *I* should do with it,” said Silas, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. Then becoming suddenly indignant, he went on : “ Such childish work ! Why half

of 'em are ashamed of what they've done, a'ready ; and well they may be ! The other half are fools and knaves, and haven't sense or honesty enough to be ashamed of anything !"

" That is strong language," said Mr. Holland, " but I am afraid it is true."

" Of course it's true ; I shouldn't say it if it wasn't. There's my son, he lives in a grand house ; I wish he had brains enough to see that he's wrong in this matter. But he *won't* see it. Why don't you lash out at 'em from the pulpit," said Silas, " and show 'em up ? It's no use for a minister to be mealy-mouthed."

But Mr. Holland had very little faith in the virtues of vituperation. He did not believe that any number of denunciatory discourses from him would produce a desirable result. His temperament and disposition, also, rendered it almost impossible for him to use upbraiding as a weapon of offence. He had a habit of endeavouring to look at the whole question from his opponent's point of view, and of trying to

discover some extenuating circumstances on their behalf ; and as he had set his heart on winning back the wanderers to the fold, and on extorting from them an acknowledgment that they had misjudged him, he carefully avoided whatever seemed calculated, in his opinion, to widen the breach that unhappily existed. “ You must let me preach in the way that is natural to me,” he said.

“ I suppose I must,” replied the miller. “ Well, I hope you will get plenty of people to come and hear you. Your congregation has increased a little, I think. I noticed three or four strangers when I was at the chapel last time.”

“ Yes,” said the minister, “ they have settled down amongst us.”

“ Good. And you’ve had an addition to your church, haven’t you ?”

“ We have ; only a week ago.”

“ Ever since you married that lady,” said the miller, pointing to Kate, “ they’ve been declaring there never would be any addition ; so they’ve been proved to be false

prophets. I am glad of it, too ; for I know they tried to persuade the parties not to join you."

This being the evening fixed for the meeting at Larberry's house, the minister and his wife soon afterwards took leave of Silas, and started for home. As they were walking up High Street, they noticed, on the opposite side of the way, a pretty, modest-looking girl leaning on the arm of Amos Flint. A young man, who had the appearance of a farmer's son, was watching them with an angry flush upon his brow, as he stood, holding a cart-whip over his shoulder, in the shadow of a gateway.

" That is Mary Gray," said Kate to her husband, as they passed on. When they reached home they found that Larberry had called during their absence, and had left word that he hoped they would not forget the meeting, and that he desired they would " come early."

It was now half-past six ; much too early to start for the cottage at present. Kate therefore lighted the lamp, closed the

shutters, drew the blind, and then sat down to write a letter to Violet; while Mr. Holland busied himself with some books he had brought down from his study. They were both occupied in this manner, when they heard the sound of the tread of many feet outside the house, and the voices of several men, talking together, mingled pleasantly, as the footsteps entered the front gate, and came up to the door.

“It is our friends come to take us with them to the meeting,” said the minister, looking at his wife with a gratified smile, as a tap was heard at the door, and the talking outside became suddenly subdued. The maid being out (for, she being an adept at eavesdropping, and an incorrigible tattler, it had been thought expedient to send her upon a long errand), Mr. Holland opened the door himself.

There stood Mr. Garrel, bowing and smiling; behind him, Dame Crock’s husband. A stout man, whom the minister did not know, had *his* station at the gate; and a group of seven or eight persons, all

looking respectfully towards the open door, had stopped short in the middle of the street.

“Come in, friends. How do you do, Mr. Garrel? How do *you* do, Mr. Crock? Come in, friends, every one, please.”

“We thought we would call on our way, sir,” said Garrel, with that full, mellow voice of his, which made every word he uttered seem important, “feeling that you would excuse the liberty on such a night as this—a night which we hope will prove a very happy one. Good-evening, ma’am. Glad to see you looking well. Thank you, I am hearty.”

The unexpected but welcome visitors came crowding in, overflowing the narrow passage.

“This friend, sir,” said Garrel, indicating the stout man with his extended arm, while his frank, open countenance beamed with good-humour—“This friend, sir, you may not have spoken to before, as he has but recently come into the town. His name is Sedlock. He is a Hampshire man, like

myself," he continued, laughing. " If you will excuse my coarseness, sir, we are both Hampshire hogs, in fact. That, no doubt," continued the brewer, " accounts for my fondness for grains—ha, ha, ha!"

" Mr. Garrel will have his joke, sir," said the stranger, as he and the minister shook hands.

" Yes, we are always merry when he is of the company," said Mr. Holland, smiling.

" Merry and wise," said Mr. Crock. " That's how it should be, ain't it, sir?"

By this time most of them had been provided with seats; the rest stood in various parts of the little room. Garrel, who was of this latter number, stood squeezed in one corner, enjoying the situation immensely.

" I hope," he said, addressing Kate in his usual hearty manner, " I hope, ma'am, we shall have the pleasure of your company at Mr. Larberry's this evening?"

" Yes, Mr. Garrel," she replied, with a smile, " I shall accompany my husband."

"We shall find several friends already there when we reach the house," said the brewer. "I saw six or seven walking down in that direction as we came along. Our whipper-in hasn't let the grass grow under his feet; for, like the rest of us, he has set his heart on having a good rally."

"I'm glad to see him continue so steadfast, after what has been said about him," remarked Kate.

"Mr. Larberry will never be turned round any more, I'm thinking," said Crock.

The dame's husband, it should be observed, was an old man of gigantic proportions, and apparently possessed of great strength, but with a soft heart, a simple nature, and much timidity. His mild, blue eyes were a truthful index of the gentleness and humility of his character. He was greatly respected.

"I am of your opinion, Mr. Crock," said Garrel.

"Mrs. Holland," said Sedlock, waving his right hand towards the company, and

speaking to Kate, “you perceive that there are *some*, at any rate, who know how to appreciate a good minister when they have one. I came to your chapel last Sunday morning for the first time, and I thought I had never heard a better sermon in my life. You see, I came without prejudice; that accounts for it. I have since had a word or two with some of those that cry down Mr. Holland, and I can assure you I told them what I thought about them, pretty plainly. I am considered a choleric man, and perhaps I am rather testy at times. I gave it them hot and strong, depend upon it.”

“I can quite believe it,” said Garrel, laughing.

“I have but recently settled in this town,” continued Sedlock, “and, please God, shall now attend at Grange Street regularly. I shall have great pleasure in bearing my part to support your cause. My business is not a bad one” (he was a confectioner), “and a sovereign or two is at your service any time.”

"Our friend means every word he says, sir," said Garrel.

"That I am sure of," replied the minister, "and I scarcely need say how much I thank him."

As it was now nearly eight o'clock, Kate left the room, and re-appeared a minute or two afterwards, attired for the walk to the cottage. The company rose, and passing one by one into the street, went on before, while Mr. Holland and his wife saw that the house was left secure. The night air was crisp and bracing, and a full moon was shining overhead, by the light of which they could distinctly make out the forms of their adherents, moving briskly on several yards in advance of them; the hard, frosty ground making their footsteps echo again.

"You feel very happy, dear, I know," said the minister gently to Kate, who was leaning upon his arm as they walked along.

"Yes," she replied.

"I will endeavour," said he, still speaking very gently, "I will endeavour always

to deserve their good opinion;" and he thought of the words an eminent divine had written: "If unworthy of your confidence, withdraw from us, break our pastoral staff, take from us the prophet's robe, drive us from our pulpits, disown us, never even by a kind look bid us God speed—I could almost say, curse us."

They had now almost reached Larberry's house, the door of which was wide open, and a broad band of ruddy light was flung athwart the darkness of the lane. Two figures, which seemed to be slinking away to escape observation, were moving in the shadow of the hedge, a few yards farther on.

"Who are they?" whispered Kate, half-terrified, to her husband.

He had been narrowly observing them, without appearing to do so, and he told his wife their names.

"Are they coming in?" she whispered, with a slight shudder.

"I don't know," he replied, "I will ask."

“If they are,” she said, “they will do great harm, will they not?”

“They will attempt it, no doubt,” said he, again glancing nervously at the two men.

“Oh! I do hope it will be prevented.”

“Hope what will be prevented, dear?”

“Their coming in,” she replied, clinging to her husband, and hurrying him up the steps.

Larberry met them at the door, with his smile of welcome, and to him Mr. Holland said in a low voice:

“You know of their being here, of course?”

“Yes,” he replied, shrugging his shoulders. “I know it too well, sir.”

“And they are coming in?” asked the minister.

“I suppose so. I didn’t invite them, but they have got wind of it, and want to see and hear all they can. They are spies. But they are nobodies after all, and can’t do us much harm. I don’t like to shut them out. Perhaps we shall teach them a lesson that will do them good.”

As he said this, the minister and his wife passed into the room; the two spies followed them directly afterwards; and Larberry, as soon as they had joined the rest of the company, closed the door.

## CHAPTER II.

## A COUNCIL OF STATE.

WHEN Mr. Holland entered the room, he found it already filled with his supporters. An arm-chair placed near the fire, with a smaller chair beside it, were the only seats vacant. These the ironmonger had reserved for the minister and his wife ; and as he now installed them therein, he said with much fervour :

“ This does my heart good, sir, and it must cheer you also, I am sure.”

“ It is a great pleasure to meet so many friends, Mr. Larberry,” said the minister.

The ironmonger, who was in a perfect fever of excitement, then procured more chairs, making jocose remarks, and looking

after everybody's welfare at the same time. The two spies, who had remained standing since their entrance, were now able to sit down, and did so, close to the door. They were both well known to Mr. Holland. Recently they had made themselves particularly busy on behalf of the opposition, and, though insignificant hitherto, were regarded as rising men. This was especially the case with respect to the younger of the two, whose name was Snooley. The appearance of this young man was certainly not prepossessing, as he had but one eye, and his face was covered with scars and gashes—so much of it, at least, as was not hidden by his stubbly beard. His companion was a middle-aged man, with a bald head, and answered to the name of Clatts.

The company having now settled themselves in their places, and the proceedings having been opened by the minister, Lisbury, advancing to the table, said :

“ I propose that Mr. Holland act as the chairman of this meeting.”

“I second that motion,” said Garrel, rising, and then resuming his seat immediately.

Carried unanimously. A score of grave and resolute countenances were then turned full upon Mr. Holland.

“Considering the purpose of our gathering, dear friends,” he said, very quietly, “I think it would be well, before any observations are made by me, to call upon Mr. Larberry to lay the business of the evening before you, and to offer any remarks that he may think proper.”

Hereupon the ironmonger stood up, and spoke as follows:

“Dear pastor and friends—I am proud to see you all under my roof on this occasion, especially, brethren, as we are met to rally round our beloved minister.” (Hear, hear.) “You are aware that Mr. Staggers, some little time ago, convened a meeting at his house; which meeting has issued a kind of requisition or resolution against our pastor. Now, in reply to *that*, we shall tonight pass a counter resolution—a resolu-

tion showing the esteem with which we regard him, and our sincere desire that he will remain amongst us. We shall pledge ourselves to endeavour to frustrate, by every means in our power, the attempts which are made by that arrogant party to which I have alluded, to ruin our cause at Grange Street. For myself, I confidently believe that the hopes of that party will eventually be disappointed—”

“ Ay, ay ! ” said Crock, in an undertone ; “ they are fighting against God, so their doings are sure to come to nought.”

“ Before I sit down,” continued the iron-monger, “ I will notice one only of the thousands of misrepresentations made by the other side, just for the purpose of stating the case as it really is. We admit that one or two good families have withdrawn from us on account of Mr. Holland. But what says the other side ? Why, that as many as thirteen high families have left on his account, and that the pew-rents are fifty pounds less than they were before he came. I will now show that that is a mis-

take. The families they allude to *left before our minister's advent, and they never even saw him.* The Smiths left last January; the Applebys in March; the Robinsons sailed for Australia in May; and all the rest went away at the beginning of June. We have lost them, but for reasons totally unconnected with our pastor's settlement here. Such events happen in all communities. I grant that the subscriptions have sadly fallen off——”

“But we will soon raise them again,” cried the irrepressible Crock.

“One word,” said Larberry, “and then I have done. *I mean to double my subscription.*” (Applause.)

He sat down, and Garrel, having caught the eye of the chairman as he rose, said :

“What my friend has just now advanced I heartily concur in. There is a party who want our pastor to go: *I say, STAY!* and I beg to make this motion—‘That, in the opinion of this meeting, Mr. Holland discharges the duties of his office faithfully and efficiently; that he has our fullest confi-

dence and respect; and that we hope we shall continue to be favoured with his ministry among us.' If you will allow me, I will sketch for you the history of our church for the past twelve months, that you may see what it was that gave rise to our present difficulties. I will go back to a period prior to our dear pastor's appearance on the scene; for, unfortunately, our troubles began some time before *he* came to Oxbury." (Hear, hear.) "About twelve months ago, a young minister was introduced to us by Mr. Staggers and Albert Winstock, and preached to us for three Sundays. He pleased all the grandees, but did not suit the bulk of the people; and when it was put to the vote, there was two to one against him. The result very much mortified Mr. Staggers and his friends, and they determined that we should either have a man of their choosing or no minister at all. From that moment we were divided into two camps. As one minister after another appeared among us, and was made the subject of discussion and voting, we

passed through many unpleasant scenes, as I need scarcely remind you. At length our dear pastor appeared——”

“ Bless the Lord for sending him,” cried Mr. Crock.

“ You are quite right, friend,” said Garrel, smiling blandly. “ As I was saying, our dear pastor appeared, and preached for six weeks ; and when it was put to the vote there was an overwhelming majority in his favour. Even then, however, Mr. Staggers did not despair of preventing his settlement among us, and employed tactics which I call abominable” (hear, hear) “to gain his end. Notwithstanding his base endeavours (for which I consider that he and his aiders and abettors ought to have been expelled from the church), our dear pastor adhered to his intention, and commenced his stated ministry. Soon afterwards he married the estimable lady now present——”

At this point of the brewer’s speech Kate blushed, smiled, and hung her head ; while the company testified their approval by loud cheers.

“Our minister’s marriage,” continued Garrel, “was, unfortunately, considered by many among us a sufficient occasion for raising a disturbance ; and then commenced a state of things which I look back upon with intense shame, abhorrence, and indignation—a state of things far more discreditable to our cause at Grange Street than anything I ever heard of in the whole course of my life. Our people were misled, hoodwinked, and ensnared in a manner I should have thought impossible among a community of rational beings, not to say Christians. The tide set in so strongly against Mr. Holland, that it threatened not only to sweep *him* away, but the whole church and congregation with him, leaving our chapel empty and desolate. I do not wish to dwell upon that period of our history—it is too painful ; but I am sorry to have to say that some, who ought to have been the first to check the current of passion and bigotry, were the means of giving greater impetus to it.” (Hear, hear.) “And when all right-minded men cried

‘shame on them,’ for their intolerance and Pharisaism, they tried to make it appear that our pastor was an unsound and ineffective preacher, and that they opposed him because they could derive no benefit from his sermons !

“ Now,” continued Garrel, gathering fresh energy with every sentence, “ against all this we enter a decided protest. It is scandalous ; it is disgraceful. In such a matter as this we are not disposed to submit to the dictation of any party. We claim the right to exercise our own private judgment. For my own part, I take no man’s word in forming an estimate of a preacher. I hear for myself ; and I can truly say that my enjoyment of our pastor’s sermons has steadily increased from the first. There has been a gradual improvement in them, and I have greatly profited.

“ I feel confident that we shall yet raise a good cause at Grange Street. Already we see many harbingers of a happy and prosperous future. Strangers, drawn by curiosity, are coming to the chapel, saying,

‘Let us hear this young man, about whom there is all this talk, and whom some stigmatise as a miserably incompetent preacher.’ They hear, they are satisfied, and they make their home among us. Others have been drawn to us by sympathy and pity, because we are a ‘feeble folk,’ and because our dear pastor has been subjected to atrocious ill-usage. He will forgive me, I hope, for what I say ; for at such a time as this I feel that I ought to speak out. I am no flatterer ; but I will say that his gentleness, his serenity, and his forbearance have charmed us all.” (Hear, hear.) “Frequently has he been attacked in the most savage manner, and still more frequently has he encountered innuendoes and sneers ; but we have always seen the same placid demeanour, the same eagerness in the work of winning souls. No wonder, then, that some of the pews vacated by his persecutors are being taken by others, who remember how the Master Himself was assailed, and in what spirit He bore the insults of His enemies.”

When the brewer sat down, several persons rose together, but they all gave way to Crock, whose large frame was now reared to its full height, while his massive and benignant features were working with emotion which he could not possibly conceal.

“The Lord is very good to us,” he said, “to spare us to see such a night as this, and I wish I could find words——”

The poor old man was here overcome by his feelings, and could only add—“I second the motion which has just been made.”

“Before that motion is put to the meeting, I beg leave to offer a few observations.”

It was Sarsley who now spoke, and the hard, unsympathetic tones of “the spy” struck the first discordant notes that had yet been heard since the proceedings commenced. The company awaited in unresponsive and unbroken silence a speech which they knew would convey opinions they must unanimously condemn.

“I bear no ill-will to Mr. Holland,” said

Snooley, “but still I must beg to differ from the other speakers upon the question at issue. In my humble judgment, the course they have recommended is no more calculated to promote his interests than those of the church generally. I grieve to see our people so disunited—one church-member at variance with another; but I see no hope of union until Mr. Holland has left us. There are those among us who desire another leader—one that they can work with; and I think their wishes ought to be consulted. The speakers this evening have not taken into account the strength and the importance of that party. It is wealthy, it is influential; and a cause not countenanced by it must, I think, fail eventually. Let Mr. Holland resign, and harmony and union will be restored, and the former energy and vigour of the church revived.”

Before any one could reply to Snooley’s speech, his companion jumped upon his legs, and followed him in the same strain.

“No doubt Mr. Holland is reckoning on

having the endowment money," said Clatts quickly, "but he will be disappointed, for he can't compel the two trustees to give him a penny of it, and they'll never pay any over to him of their own free will. They can do what they like with the money, and it would be foolish to defy them. I have heard too, that one of our deacons, Mr. Gloss, thinks of resigning his office, and of building a little chapel at Peeble's Lane, about two miles from here. If that should be the case, a great many persons will follow him, and Grange Street will be almost entirely deserted. Ought we not to avert such an evil as that? I do hope that Mr. Holland will consult the interests of his people, and also his own peace, safety, and reputation, by resigning."

This was the culminating point of the debate, and the minister, who had been calmly but intently listening to every word that had been spoken, thought that the time had now arrived when he should reply. A few well-chosen sentences from him would settle the question, as far as his sup-

porters were concerned, once for all. The latter, who had manifested some uneasiness and distress while Snooley and Clatts were speaking, would feel inexpressibly relieved by their discomfiture at his hands ; and he now rose and said :

“ I do not myself experience those apprehensions which were expressed on my behalf by the two last speakers.” (Hear, hear.) “ I give Mr. Snooley and Mr. Clatts credit for really believing there will be the difficulty as to financial affairs which they have mentioned ; but the prospect does not terrify me, and I will dismiss the matter by simply saying, that I will answer for it the trustees will not fail to hand over to me everything to which I can lay a claim, and that I shall receive the rents and dividends when they are due to me.

“ Mr. Garrel,” he continued, “ has sketched the history of the church for the past twelve months, and has done so candidly, honestly, and truthfully. That sketch is a sufficient answer to the indictments that have been brought against me

on various occasions. I have been charged, for instance, with being the cause of strife ; and it has been said that if I really loved the church and sought its welfare, instead of consulting—as they say I do—my own interests exclusively, I should at once retire, in order that peace might be restored. But my retirement would *not* restore peace" (hear, hear) "and it should not be forgotten that factions existed in the church previously to my arrival here. You have heard something to-night of the plots and counter-plots, the manœuvres, and the misrepresentations which were rife among you then. We see the same things now, and may expect to see them in the future ; but I hope not for ever, for it shall be the purpose of my life to establish the peace of the church upon a secure and solid foundation."

(Applause.)

"But I have a proposal to make," continued Mr. Holland, glancing at the two "spies,"—"a proposal which will show that I wish to consult the feelings of all parties, and which will indicate the manner in

which union and peace may be restored. It is this—If those who have left the chapel will return to it, and will evince a disposition to form a right opinion of me and of my preaching ; if they will work with me, and honestly strive to deal fairly with me—then, in six months' time, that is to say, next midsummer, I will put myself in the hands of the church, and should it then appear that my labours among you have not resulted in the conversion of any souls, and should the church declare by vote that it wishes me to resign, I will do so at once. I have now done. I hope I have made myself fully understood, and that you will make known to all whom it may concern the terms I have now offered. May Grange Street soon see better days !”

“ If you talk of conversions, sir,” said Reuben Crock, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, “ you needn’t wait till midsummer to know whether your labours have been blessed.”

Five or six persons rose upon their feet, one after another, and bore similar testi-

mony, until the place became a very Bochim. At length Larberry said :

“ Our beloved pastor will now permit me to put the resolution to the vote. It has been moved by Mr. Garrel and seconded by Mr. Crock—‘ That, in the opinion of this meeting, Mr. Holland discharges the duties of his office faithfully and efficiently; that he has our fullest confidence and respect; and that we hope we shall continue to be favoured with his ministry among us.’ Those of you who are in favour of that motion will signify the same by holding up the right hand.”

Excepting Snooley and Clatts, every one held up his hand; Crock held up both hands.

“ On the contrary!” shouted Larberry, looking at the two “spies,” but neither did they hold up their hands *against* the motion, and the ironmonger declared it carried *nem. con.*; then, darting at Mr. Holland, he shook him by both hands, while the rest of the company crowded round, and in the exuberance of their joy

repeated the process so many times that the minister wondered if they would ever tire.

As the company were dispersing, Sedlock said, in an undertone, to Larberry :

“ What did you think of Mr. Holland’s proposal ?”

“ Why, I admire him more than ever for having made it,” replied the ironmonger.

“ Do you think the other party will accept the terms he has offered ?” inquired Sedlock.

“ I can’t say,” replied Larberry, “ but if Snooley and Clatts are really as anxious for union and peace as they profess to be, they will get Mr. Staggers to lay the matter before his friends, and induce them to embrace this opportunity.”

## CHAPTER III.

## MUTUAL FRIENDS.

THE time had now arrived for the Rector of Oxbury to fulfil his engagement with Mr. Praxton. On a dull, windy morning in January, therefore, he drove down to the familiar railway station, and started upon his long and tedious journey. He had left word at home that he hoped to return in two or three days. Emily Cornford also had received a similar assurance, and had already begun to count the hours that intervened between that wished-for event and his last visit at Poppleton Hall. Of late Mr. Maxforth had lunched with the squire rather oftener than had been his wont; but, although the Rector still ad-

hered to his resolution to forget Miss Vaveley, it would be too much to say that he had paid either of Mr. Cornford's agreeable daughters marked attentions. He liked Emily better than her sister, and quite believed that he would be considered a fortunate man by the county if he could secure her as his wife ; yet he had not betrayed any decided preference for her society, and there had been no love-making between them. As to Miss Vaveley, it was not probable that he and the minister's beautiful sister-in-law would ever meet again. On the whole, *perhaps* it was not desirable they should meet again. Scamborough was at no great distance from Seftwick, certainly ; but he resolved not to throw himself in her way when he arrived at his destination. He would endeavour to remain steadfast to the purpose he had formed, to marry a woman who would help to make his career as a clergyman successful.

When the train reached Scamborough Station, Mr. Praxton came up and wel-

comed him most heartily. Mr. Praxton was a stout man, about eight and thirty years old, with a ruddy complexion, a thick brown moustache and beard, and small keen, grey eyes. Altogether he had not a very clerical appearance. He was a widower. He had a snug little parsonage in Queen Street, and here the two ecclesiastics, after a comfortable dinner, were sitting in the drawing-room, and chatting pleasantly about old times, and also respecting certain alterations in the chancel of St. Jude's Church, which Mr. Praxton had in contemplation. Presently little Bob Praxton was brought in for a kiss and a look at the strange gentleman.

“My only child, Maxforth,” said his father, with a proud smile, but with a tear in his eye. “The image of his poor mother.” And then little Bob, after some lively prattle, was taken off to bed.

“You will stay with me till Saturday, I hope, Maxforth,” said Mr. Praxton. “It is seven years since I saw you, and your society will enliven my dull home con-

siderably. Do let me have your company as long as you can."

"Thank you; but I must get back to Oxbury on Tuesday, at the latest. My curate, Mr. Peake, is not a strong man, and the work in my parish is by no means light. I should not feel justified in keeping away longer than that."

"Shouldn't you? Well, I should have been thankful to detain you a week, though it is true Scamborough has no attractions for a visitor in this winter time. Of course, in the summer our coast scenery is very beautiful, and the sea and the shipping would have had some charm for you. But strangers generally find the winds in this northern region too harsh and piercing at this season of the year."

"How far are you from the seashore?" inquired Mr. Maxforth.

"Well, the nearest point is about five miles off."

"Yours is a dangerous coast, I have heard. The number of wrecks is considerable, is it not?"

“ I am sorry to say it is ; but we have had no casualty for some time. There are few grander sights, Maxforth, than what you may see in winter from Scamborough Head, when the sea runs high on our rocks. I thought of driving you over on Monday, if you would like to go.”

“ Thank you. I have never seen the east coast in winter, and it would be an agreeable novelty.”

“ There is a village about five miles from here,” said Mr. Praxton, averting his eyes from his guest, “ a village called Seftwick, from which there is a finer view of the sea than even that from Scamborough Head. The drive to it is much pleasanter too. Suppose we go to Seftwick instead, Maxforth ?”

“ Certainly,” returned the Rector, suddenly feeling hot and confused, and contemplating an engraving on the wall with much apparent interest.

“ Very well, then. We will start early, and spend the day in the village. There is a good hotel there.”

The two friends accordingly drove over to Seftwick on Monday morning, reaching the "Seven Stars" at about twelve o'clock. Having ordered an early dinner, they went out again for a walk upon the beach. There was but little wind, and the sea was comparatively calm, but the Rector professed to enjoy the prospect from the sandhills amazingly. He made a few inquiries of his companion regarding the residents in the village, but none of the names mentioned by Mr. Praxton was that of any one with whom he was acquainted. Mr. Maxforth naturally supposed that his friend knew nothing of Mrs. Vaveley and her daughter. They returned to the hotel, and ate their modest dinner in silence, both feeling somewhat uncomfortable and moody. The meal over, Mr. Praxton debated in his own mind as to what course he should take. He wished to make a call in the village, *alone*; yet it would scarcely be polite or courteous to leave his guest by himself while he did so. He was thinking the matter over, when, to his great relief,

the Rector stated that he would like to write two or three letters.

“ All right, Maxforth,” said he, jumping up from his chair ; “ then I will just take a turn out of doors till you have finished.”

Mr. Praxton walked quickly in the direction of the village green, saying to himself, “ He is just the kind of man she would be likely to take to ; and, under the circumstances, I do not wish to put him in the way of temptation, especially when my own footing is not secure.”

When he came to the green he walked across to a cottage covered with ivy, standing in a corner overlooking the sea, and knocked at the door.

“ Is Mrs. Vaveley in ?” he inquired of the servant who appeared.

“ Yes, sir ; please to walk in.”

Meanwhile Mr. Maxforth was writing his letters at the “ Seven Stars.” They (the letters) were not important or long ones, and a few minutes sufficed in which to finish them. He then took his hat and started to seek the post-office and his ab-

sent friend, supposing that the latter would be sauntering upon the esplanade. He posted his letters, but Mr. Praxton was nowhere to be seen. It therefore occurred to the Rector that, being at Seftwick, he might as well call upon Mrs. Vaveley. He need not stay, of course, more than a few minutes, and would probably be back at the hotel before his friend returned to it. He asked a boy who was passing to direct him to Mrs. Vaveley's house, and in a very short time he was knocking at the door where Mr. Praxton had entered about an hour previously. Mr. Maxforth sent in his card, and was shown by the servant into an unoccupied room. By-and-by Mrs. Vaveley entered, having an air of refinement and dignity that was habitual with her.

“It is very kind of you, Mr. Maxforth,” she said, when the salutations were over and they were both seated, “to call upon me. I have heard much of you from my two daughters, and feel under many obligations to you for the attention you have

shown to my eldest daughter and her husband at Oxbury."

The Rector made a polite reply, and then explained how he came to be at Seftwick, and that he had accompanied an old friend of his, Mr. Praxton, the Vicar of St. Jude's, Scamborough.

"Mr. Praxton!" cried Mrs. Vaveley, raising her eyebrows with wonder. "What a curious coincidence. He is in the house at this moment."

"Here! in your house?" echoed the Rector in bewilderment. "You astonish me, Mrs. Vaveley. I had not the least idea you and he were at all acquainted."

"He has called here occasionally," returned the widow. "I have now left Mr. Praxton and my daughter in the other room. Shall we join them?"

When the Vicar of St. Jude's saw Mr. Maxforth come into the room he looked astounded, and could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. He had never suspected that his friend had any knowledge of the family, and had supposed the latter

was at that moment busy with his correspondence at the "Seven Stars." He watched the greeting that ensued with some curiosity and suspicion. Sooth to say, when he beheld the rich colour mounting to Violet's face and neck, and the modest delight which she could not disguise, his heart sank within him.

"This is an unexpected meeting, Maxforth," he said dryly.

"I have been seeking you in all directions," returned the Rector, smiling.

Mrs. Vaveley then asked Mr. Maxforth if he had lately seen her daughter at Oxbury, and if she and her husband were in health, adding that she had not heard from them for several days. This inquiry gave rise to a long conversation regarding Mr. Holland, his wife and people, the Rector's own church and parishioners, and kindred topics; and, the evening drawing on apace while they were thus pleasantly occupied, Mrs. Vaveley asked them to stay and take tea, which the visitors readily consented to do. Mr. Praxton was the

only one of the party not entirely happy ; nevertheless he made himself agreeable, and the occasion was a most enjoyable one to at least two of the company. Violet's glorious eyes and wondrous beauty made an impression upon Mr. Maxforth's heart that completely overcame his previous resolutions, and Emily Cornford was now forgotten. After tea Mrs. Vaveley and the Vicar of St. Jude's carried on a lively conversation touching church decorations, while Violet and the Rector were seated together at the window overlooking the sea. It was now too dark to make out objects with any clearness, but they could distinguish the white line where the waves beat upon the beach, and their roar was of course distinctly audible. When walking upon the esplanade that morning Mr. Maxforth had felt an unwonted exhilaration as he viewed the fine bay that stretched for miles before him ; but as he and Violet looked out of the window the shape of the bay could not be discerned, only what appeared to be tongues of flame leaping into

the black sky could be seen at a great distance.

“They are the furnace-fires on the opposite shore of the bay,” explained Violet in a low, sweet voice.

“I noticed several columns of smoke curling up there this morning,” said the Rector. “They are the ironstone-works, I suppose?” And he gazed upon the fair girl with undisguised admiration.

“Yes. A great deal of ironstone is found in those hills. It is a great mining district.”

“I thought I could make out two or three villages or towns through the mist, but I do not know their names.”

“The nearest is Torwick. Eskham is farther out; and both are inhabited chiefly by miners and ironstone-workers. On a clear day we can see Tambury, the watering-place, also, but not very well.”

“They are not in this county, I think?”

“No,” replied Violet; “they are in Yorkshire. The counties, you know, are divided by the river that empties itself into the bay about two miles below.”

“People cross over to Seftwick from those places sometimes, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, in the summer-time, but not at this season of the year. It is not considered quite safe.”

“May I ask why not?”

“For several reasons, you know. The rocks at Torwick and Eskham are rather dangerous, and great care and caution are needed even in calm weather.”

“Another reason, please.”

“Well,” returned Violet, laughing, and wondering that they should find so much to interest them in these facts, “I will try to explain.” She and the Rector did not dream, of course, that these matters could ever be of the slightest concern to them or to any with whom they were connected. Can any of us tell what the future has in store for us?

“I will try to explain,” repeated Violet. “There is a reef opposite that has been fatal to many vessels, but boats crossing the bay can ordinarily keep clear of that. The reef, therefore, we need not take into

account. There is a strong current at the mouth of the river ; but worst of all, perhaps, are the sandbanks."

"Are they extensive ?"

"Very ; and the boats from Torwick or Eskham, or Tambury have to be very carefully steered indeed, for the channel is rather narrow, and they have to keep on the watch for any change of wind which might drive them on to the sandbanks."

"I see. How far might it be across—say from Seftwick to Eskham ?"

"Well, I should think about five miles," said Violet.

Their *tête-à-tête* was here interrupted by Mr. Praxton, who opined that they had better be going, as they had a long drive before them. Somewhat unwillingly therefore, Mr. Maxforth rose from his chair ; and after a cordial leave-taking, the two friends betook themselves to the "Seven Stars," and thence to Scamborough, which they reached at about eleven o'clock, having exchanged only a few unimportant and guarded remarks with reference to the

singular meeting at the house of their mutual friends. The Rector would now gladly have delayed his return to Oxbury had it been possible for him to find a decent excuse for doing so. He really was in love with Violet, and did not at all like the idea of leaving the neighbourhood without coming to an understanding with her. Mr. Praxton, he knew, was not an altogether ineligible suitor, and the many opportunities he enjoyed would certainly be turned to the best account. It could not be helped, however; return to Oxbury he must, and when there he would write to Violet and ask her to be his wife.

The question was, Might not his friend forestall him? If so, what would her answer be?

## CHAPTER IV.

## MRS. HOLLAND'S TROUBLES.

ON the morning of the day when Mr. Maxforth returned to Oxbury, Mrs. Holland received a letter from Violet, of which the following is a copy:

“ MY DEAREST KITTY,

“ How sad it is to find your difficulties and trials increasing so fast around you. I am indeed grieved with the accounts you have sent us. What dreadful people yours are! I do trust you will soon see a change for the better, although really the prospect is very gloomy.

“ You will be glad to hear, darling, that

mamma likes Seftwick on the whole, notwithstanding the stormy weather here and the many gales we have had. You know we dreaded coming to spend a winter in this bleak place, but the doctor's orders were peremptory. Well, the winds are dreadfully cutting, and howl savagely around the house; and when we promenade the sands at low water, wrapped to the throat in the heaviest of clothing, the wind searches us out to the very marrow. But, strange to say, dear, though it shrivels the skin and chills the blood, there is neither cold nor cough in any amount of exposure to it, while its immediate after-effect is a great stimulus to the appetite. When the air is from the east it sometimes brings up a fog or 'fret,' which clouds the seaward view and affects you disagreeably with a sense of rawness. But the atmosphere is always bracing, and that is the great recommendation of the place to those who have sound enough stamina to stand it. Mamma's health has wonderfully improved, the briny freshness of the breezes

just suiting her constitution ; so our fears have vanished.

“ I love to talk to the fishermen ; they are a hardy, independent set of men. I am very fond, too, of watching the troops of gulls that keep skimming the crests of the breakers, and the dunlings or sea-snipe. The water-edge is alive with them ; and when you surprise them on some sand-bank they take short, jerky flights, to light again ahead of you, with their shrill piping cry. You must leave those tiresome people of yours at Oxbury, Kitty, for a few weeks, and come and enjoy this with us.

“ We have already gained a few friends in this neighbourhood, and among them is Mr. Praxton, the Vicar of St. Jude’s, Scamborough. Mamma and I were introduced to him at a meeting, and he has called upon us several times. He is a good man, and I like him very much. He is a widower, with one little boy.

“ What do you think, darling ? Mr. Maxforth has been to see us ! Is not that wonderful news ? He and Mr. Praxton

drove over from Scamborough yesterday to enjoy the view from Sefwick Bay, and they called, one after the other. Mr. Maxforth was very agreeable and kind. He spoke so nicely about you and Philip, and said he should have come to see you often, only he knows if he were seen coming, it would make your people suspicious. I quite think so, too, dear; Mr. Copperfox and the rest would think Philip had a leaning towards the Church, and that there was some conspiracy. You may rely upon it, Kitty, that Mr. Maxforth is a true friend and sympathiser, though circumstances will not admit of his showing it openly. Now I must conclude this scrawl, for I see Mr. Praxton crossing the green towards our house, and looking as though he were bent upon some important business. What can it be?

“ With fondest love believe me,

“ My dearest Kitty,

“ Ever your affectionate sister,

“ VIOLET.”

The latter part of this letter set Mrs.

Holland thinking, and in the course of the day she gave it to her husband to read. He also pondered it carefully, and then they talked about it for some time. It was evident, they said, that Mr. Praxton was about to propose to Violet. Would she accept him? The match would not be a bad one, all things considered. They would wait to hear the result.

That part of the letter which referred to Mr. Maxforth was very satisfactory, at any rate. It was pleasing to find he had taken the trouble to make the call, and they were touched by the sympathy he had shown for them in their troubles. They were impressed, too, by the thoughtfulness and caution he had displayed on their behalf, although Mr. Holland denied that his people had any right to suspect him.

“I have no leaning towards the Church,” he said, “if by that phrase is meant a wish to enter it. I do not desire to enter the Church. I desire to live and die a Non-conformist.”

“Yes, dear, I know; but Mr. Maxforth

does not wish to give people any occasion to talk."

No more was said, and the minister went into his study to write his reply to the requisition, which reply was duly despatched that afternoon.

Now Mr. Flint, as soon as he received it, lost no time in making the acting trustee and his friends acquainted with its nature. Mr. Holland had simply intimated that he did not intend to leave Oxbury, and his letter concluded with an invitation to all "who loved the cause of God" at Grange Street to co-operate with him in endeavouring to promote its prosperity. Thus, in about three sentences, Mr. Staggers' mandate was finally disposed of. A longer reply than this was not perhaps needed—far less any comment upon the action the trustees' party had taken. Recent events had spoken with sufficient clearness and eloquence.

At the time the manifesto was drawn up, Mr. Staggers had purposed convening a second meeting at his house, at which the

minister's reply was to be read, and such further measures framed as might be deemed necessary. That intention, however, had for some time been abandoned. It was doubtful indeed whether any one could now be induced to attend another similar meeting. Did not all Oxbury know what Mr. Holland's answer would be? Why then should anybody make himself ridiculous by hearing it publicly read to him?

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Mr. Staggers and his party had begun to manifest a desire to return to Grange Street. There was not one of them who had any such intention. On the contrary, their opposition was at this time becoming more determined every day. In fact they were resolved to carry on the war *à outrance*.

Nor were they without hope of an ultimate triumph. The minister was not going to resign immediately it was true; but if they managed matters properly he might be induced to leave at midsummer. At

the worst, therefore, they had but to wait five or six months before shouting their pæan. Messrs. Snooley and Clatts had told them that he had promised—absolutely and unconditionally—to go at midsummer. The reader is aware that Mr. Holland had attached a certain proviso to the promise. That proviso, however, “the two spies” had carefully suppressed in making their report of the proceedings at Larberry’s house. Mr. Staggers’ party, readily believing an account which accorded so exactly with their wishes, were, therefore, in tolerably good spirits, and refused to give credence to any one who ventured to name the minister’s conditions.

The struggle, we regret to say, was now becoming desperate. Perhaps no man ever loved peace more than poor Mr. Holland, and yet he was now embroiled with his people to a degree which we hope is but seldom witnessed. No doubt he himself was in some measure blameworthy. There were times when he would think that if from the first he had held the reins with a

firmer hand, and had used his power more than he had done, that Grange Street might possibly have been spared the anarchy and the disgrace with which it was now visited. And yet even then he told himself there were others far more answerable for these evils than he was. Any disinterested person, on being made acquainted with all the circumstances of the case would, he felt sure, be of that opinion. On the whole, therefore, the minister bore his troubles with equanimity.

Mrs. Holland's trials, however, arising from the "Grange Street Dorcas Society," were hardly endured with so much patience and fortitude; for the poor woman was high-spirited. Had not each of her predecessors been the president of that worthy society from time immemorial? Alas! the honour had never been conferred upon unfortunate Mrs. Holland! She had expected it, of course, and had waited for it for many weary months; but in vain. Mrs. Albert Winstock had long since made up her mind that the minister's wife should

never be president. The former lady was now in possession of that dignity, which had been conferred upon her by the solemn vote of "the sisters" when Mr. Bathosley and his wife had retired from Oxbury, on the understanding that when the interregnum ended, if the new minister should prove a married man, Mrs. Winstock should vacate the chair in favour of his wife. Unhappy Mrs. Holland, however, was suffering the consequences of her husband's unpopularity. So far from retiring in her favour, Mrs. Albert Winstock was bent on keeping her out of the society altogether. "The ladies" had now commenced their winter session, but at the same time were persistently ignoring Katie's very existence. What was to be done? Mrs. Larberry, herself a member of the society, and honestly indignant that the minister's wife should be so treated—said something should be done without delay. At the very next meeting of "the sisters," she resolved that she would give battle to Mrs. Albert Winstock upon this

all-important subject. Nor did she flinch from her purpose when the long-expected day had at length arrived. Tea was over in Mrs. Todd's parlour, one afternoon, and "the sisters"—about nine of them, were busily engaged with their needlework. Mrs. Larberry bided her time.

There was no lack of topics to impart piquancy to the conversation. Just now, they were all talking about Amos Flint, and wondering what Mary Gray could see in him, and why she did not rather favour the young farmer; while some declared that the young farmer would marry her after all. Mrs. Todd's two daughters, Johanna and Esther, came in for their share of notice also, for it was known that a couple of very proper young men were just now beginning to pay them particular attentions. Jael and Judith Staggers were, in their turn, pleasantly rallied because as yet they had no *beaux*. During all this time Mrs. Larberry was gasping, her countenance crimson and deadly pale by turns, as she awaited an opening. At length the

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talk came back to Mr. Holland, and thus, by an easy transition, to his wife. Then she began, addressing the president.

“There is one thing upon my mind, Mrs. Winstock,” said Katie’s protectress, faltering a little in the august presence of the “quality” of Grange Street. “Mrs. Holland would *so* much like to join us; I mean no offence, but she feels it *very* much, because she has not been invited to do so.”

The president drew herself up, and absolutely panted with amazement. The rest sat gazing on the two combatants with breathless interest.

“These meetings,” continued Mrs. Larberry, “have always been under the presidency of the minister’s wife; and I think now Mrs. Holland occupies that position she ought to be asked to take the place among us that she is entitled to.” The valiant woman felt very hot as she spoke these words, while the sisters seemed shocked by her temerity.

“Mrs. Larberry,” said the president, with a lofty and reproving air, “I am sorry

to say I cannot agree with you. In the first place, we do not recognise Mr. Holland as our minister. He ought never to have come here, and the sooner he goes away the better."

A flutter of acquiescence on the part of the company convinced the speaker that she was upon safe ground, and encouraged her to proceed.

"As to Mrs. Holland, I do not know her, and I have no wish to know her. Sooner than consent to admit her to our circle I would resign my connection with this society altogether."

"And *I* am of the same mind," said Jael Staggers. "I am very sorry Mrs. Larberry thought fit to introduce the subject."

"Then I will go," said the ironmonger's wife; and, rising, she left the room and the house with tears in her eyes. "Poor dear creature!" she murmured to herself; "so young, and so forlorn!"

"If I were you," she remarked to Mrs. Holland, when relating this incident, "I

would go in some day, and take my place among them, whether they asked me or not."

But this Katie would not consent to do. Nevertheless she was acutely sensible of the unkindness of the sisterhood.

"What cruelty; what injustice; what malignity!" she exclaimed to her husband; and on his attempting to soothe her, she said, "You, Philip, are so phlegmatic; but I feel that I hate them!"

At first she formed a plan of establishing a similar society of her own, but it was relinquished after a little consideration, although a sufficient amount of support was guaranteed.

"Let us see if things will not work round of themselves," she said.

The Dorcas meetings were occasionally held, by the permission of the deacons, in the lower schoolroom attached to Grange Street Chapel. To this room there was a private entrance for the minister, through a little vestry, the door of which opened on to his garden, the key being always carried in

Mr. Holland's pocket. As the sisters found that there was a strong current of air proceeding from this vestry, they were accustomed to suspend over the door of the schoolroom a large crimson curtain, by which means they greatly enhanced the comfort they derived from the large fire they kept burning, and also from the cosy carpet that had been spread for the occasion. Now it happened that the minister and the church-members had decided to hold a series of special prayer-meetings, and they were to meet in another room *above* that which Messrs. Flint and Gloss had granted for the use of the Dorcas Society. This arrangement was made by the deacons, because the sisters had already engaged the lower room for that very week. The minister and his wife, however, were not in the secret; indeed, neither of them had the slightest suspicion that the "ladies" ever held their meetings there at all.

One night in that week Mr. Holland and Kate, who of course were going to attend the special prayer-meeting, made their way

across the garden, and the minister unlocked the vestry-door. No sooner had he done so than they heard the sound of talking in the large inner room.

"Who are they? and what is going on?" said Kate in a whisper, as they stood for a moment in total darkness.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Philip.

"Perhaps it is the 'Benefit Club,'" suggested his wife. "They do have the use of the room once a month, you know."

"It can't be," he rejoined. "It is not their night;" and, pushing the room-door open as he spoke, down came the large crimson curtain. Astonished beyond measure, the minister and his wife stepped into the room, and found themselves in the presence of the Dorcas Society!

A smile stole over Philip's face as he bowed to the company. As to Kate, she did not know where to look, and kept close to her husband. Two or three of the sisters rose, in a confused and shamefaced manner, and returned their bow; but the rest, among whom were Mrs. Albert Win-

stock and Jael Staggers, bent their heads over their work, and plied their needles with nervous but defiant industry. Then, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, Mrs. Holland followed her husband across the room, and ascended the stairs to the prayer-meeting.

## CHAPTER V.

## SPREADING THE NET.

IT was, of course, very gratifying to poor Mr. Holland to know that he had a good number of followers ready to support him at any time with some amount of enthusiasm. After that meeting at Larberry's, he told himself it was impossible to doubt that his work in Oxbury had been attended with sufficient success to prove that he had not mistaken his vocation after all, let his opponents say what they might.

Still, he did not overlook the difficulties of his position. He reflected that the party opposed to him was as numerous as his own, while it contained several persons who were possessed of far greater stead-

fastness of resolution, length of purse and energy, than some of his own adherents could boast of. And how he was to deal with those opponents was still the problem. They were bent, he thought, on mischief, and seemed deaf to the voice of reason. He had made several attempts to win them back to him, visiting them at their own houses, and employing every argument he could think of; but all without effect. Under present circumstances he could not entertain the idea of endeavouring to bring about their expulsion from the church. They were too strong for that; besides, it was too extreme and violent a proceeding, and one that would defeat the end he had in view, namely, their restoration to Grange Street. But it was evident that they would not come back unless he could thoroughly establish himself without their assistance, or, rather, in spite of their opposition, and unless, also, he could obtain such success as to make them appear foolish in the eyes of all men if they continued to disparage him.

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He had been assured that the course he had marked out for himself would bring upon him sufferings little short of martyrdom, and he thought it might indeed do so ; but the assurance did not shake his resolution to persevere in that course. He inwardly said that, though he were broken on the wheel, his purpose should be adhered to. The people needed the inculcation of broader views and more Christian feelings than they had hitherto entertained. Their sectarianism and spiritual pride must be rooted out, if possible. These things could not be done in less than three or four years, and until they were done he must remain at his post.

Then he considered how easily a slight ebullition of temper, or some indiscretion, on his part, might give his enemies an advantage which they could turn to his overthrow. He was greatly provoked and irritated at the church meetings, for Mr. Copperfox and the rest who were like-minded, although they attended worship at various other chapels on the Sunday,

never omitted to be present at Grange Street on those occasions, and were constantly tormenting him. Being capable of some self-restraint, however, he had not as yet committed himself; but, nevertheless, these petty annoyances were hard to bear. No one knew this better than Mr. Copperfox, who was far more ingenious in discovering and applying new systems of torture than all the rest of the rebels put together. It was a mercy that Mr. Staggers never condescended to be present at these church meetings, or the minister might have been overmatched.

Since the meeting at the trustee's house the two deacons had been very shy of Mr. Holland, never speaking to him unless absolutely obliged to do so. Mr. Flint was never absent from any of the services, but carefully avoided the most distant allusion to the requisition, and gave expression to his discontent only in his prayers, which were of a most doleful character. As to Mr. Gloss, his visits to Grange Street were becoming few and far between. He was

negotiating with somebody for a piece of land in Peeble's Lane, on which to build a small chapel, where all who were dissatisfied with Mr. Holland could find a refuge. Secretly encouraged by Mr. Flint, patronised by Albert Winstock, smiled upon by Copperfox, the senior deacon was regarded on all hands as likely to work more mischief to the minister by means of this pet scheme of his than had been effected by any hostile movement yet made. The new year had scarcely begun when Mr. Gloss sent a letter to the church, resigning his office as deacon. Mr. Copperfox, who never allowed an opportunity to pass unimproved, at once proposed "that the resignation be not accepted;" and in a clever speech, during the delivery of which he looked very hard at the imperturbable pastor in the chair, he managed to make several disagreeable observations. They were of little avail, however: his "enenvomed shafts," as Larberry afterwards termed them, flew harmlessly aside, and the occasion went by without producing any

substantial advantage to his party. If Mr. Gloss should leave Grange Street altogether, its small Sunday school would lose a superintendent popular with some of the teachers, and also with a number of the children. On the other hand, as he was no friend to Mr. Holland, and as there were others quite competent to fill his place, his departure need not occasion so much regret after all. The minister, therefore, was entirely passive in the matter, content that it should be decided by circumstances. Should the senior deacon withdraw, it was highly probable that his friends would make some demonstration in his honour, and thus their partisanship would be more strongly developed than ever. But that could not be helped, however much any farther unsettlement of the church was to be deplored.

The energies of Mr. Staggers' faction were more particularly directed just now to the work of detaching from Mr. Holland his leading supporters one by one. Roger Garrel, Larberry, and Crock being the

three pillars on which the minister's cause was supposed to rest, it was to these individuals that the most attention was paid, the triumvirate being courted and flattered in a manner not always reflecting the highest credit upon those who honoured them with their notice. Occasionally the trio would receive friendly little notes urging them to go to the Methodist meeting-house, where a newly-arrived minister was preaching with great acceptance, and where they might reckon on receiving a hearty welcome. But these attentions were not confined to the three persons mentioned. There was hardly one of the minister's adherents who was not invited, again and again, to go either to the Parish Church to hear Mr. Maxforth, or to the Methodist Chapel, or else to the Calvinist's. The invitations, however, were not accepted.

In thus opposing the minister, no one was more active than Albert Winstock. The miller's son was a slightly-built, undersized young man, with a small, whiskerless face, and an extremely thin crop of light

auburn hair. He was dressed in the height of the fashion, and carried on his person a good deal of jewellery. Being Silas Winstock's only son, his expectations were by no means small. Now, this young man, having a settled conviction that Mr. Holland's cause depended almost entirely upon Roger Garrel, and that if the latter could be alienated from him the minister would speedily be deserted by the rest of his supporters, had devised a scheme which he fondly hoped would secure that object.

One wintry afternoon, as he was walking down High Street, he observed the brewer, who happened to be looking in at a shop window on the opposite side of the way. "I will try what I can do with him," said Albert to himself, and Garrel chancing to catch his eye at the same moment, he made a sign, and the brewer crossed the street, and came up to him.

"Can you spare me half a minute?" said Albert Winstock, shaking him by the hand, and assuming an easy and familiar manner.

"Certainly; an hour if you wish it," returned Garrel, with obliging alacrity.

Upon this, Albert Winstock linked his arm in that of the brewer, and led him down the street and into the churchyard, where they paced to and fro for nearly an hour, talking very earnestly together, but in so low a tone that the passers-by could not overhear a word that was spoken. As they were parting Albert Winstock said :

"Will you come and spend an hour or two with me to-morrow night, if you are not otherwise engaged?"

"Thank you; I will, with pleasure," replied Garrel in his most mellifluous tones.

"Good-bye, then," said Albert Winstock, and continuing his way along the street, he at length stopped in front of his father's house, and gave a loud and aristocratic knock at the door.

Admitted by old Silas in person, he entered the sitting-room, when, to his surprise and chagrin, he found poor Mr. Holland sitting, calm and self-contained, in

the arm-chair by the fire, where he had been holding one of his amicable arguments with the miller, respecting the doctrine of election.

The minister, who highly appreciated the mingled astuteness and kindness of old Winstock, and who always enjoyed these arguments with him, was not greatly delighted, as may be supposed, by this interruption to their talk ; but, nevertheless, he rose and saluted the young man. Albert Winstock, without returning his greeting, came forward on to the hearthrug, and standing with his back to the fire, proceeded to tell his father about a certain horse he had been buying in the market that day. Occasionally, when the conversation had at length turned to general subjects, Mr. Holland put in a remark or two, to which the old miller responded. But from first to last Albert Winstock did not take the slightest notice of the unfortunate minister or of his observations. Mrs. Albert Winstock entered the room soon afterwards, and, disdaining to bestow

a word or a glance upon Mr. Holland, settled down to read a book at the window.

“Albert, my lad,” said old Silas, addressing his son, about an hour afterwards, when the minister had gone home, “I want to ask you one question.”

“Very well,” said the young man uneasily; “ask it, then.”

“I want to ask you if you are still accustomed to attend worship at Grange Street?”

“Yes; I am.”

“You are still a member of Mr. Holland’s congregation, then?”

“You may say so, if you like,” replied his son doggedly.

“Then I want to ask you,” continued Silas, striking the arm of his chair with his knuckles, and peering into the young man’s face with a frown of displeasure, “I want to ask you whether you consider you behaved properly to him, just now?”

“I don’t consider at all about it.”

“What do you mean?” demanded his father.

The daughter-in-law had laid down her book when this conversation commenced, and at this juncture thought it would be well to interpose.

“Albert doesn’t like him, as you know, Mr. Winstock; and he cannot help showing it,” she said diplomatically.

“Can’t help showing it, indeed!” said the miller; “but he ought to help it, and he must help it. He has no right to be contemptuous and rude.”

“I shall not have anything to say to him,” said Albert.

“Neither shall I,” said the daughter-in-law. “As I told Mrs. Larberry the other day, at the Dorcas meeting, when she wanted us to admit Mrs. Holland; we do not acknowledge him, nor do we mean to associate with him, in any way.”

“Then I must say that I have a very poor opinion of you,” said the old man.

“We can’t help that,” was Albert’s rejoinder.

“Only I thought you professed to be a

gentleman, and, if so, you should behave as such."

"Never mind my behaviour," replied his son, as he fingered his jewelled ring; "I am quite able to conduct my own affairs."

"Are you? It was unfortunate that you mixed yourself up with the troubles at Grange Street, in the way you did. How came you to send Mr. Holland that letter, and to make yourself so busy in opposing him?"

"I had every right to do it, if I found that I did not profit by his preaching," replied Albert, dusting his coat with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Isn't he sufficiently learned, then?"

"No; he isn't profound enough for me."

"Well, that *is* good!" said his father, with a smile. "Why, it would be hard to find any head so empty as yours in all Ox-bury, and *you* to talk of not profiting!"

"Albert always said that Mr. Holland had not sufficient ability," said the daughter-in-law, with candour.

“Yes, I have always held that opinion,” remarked her husband.

Silas laid his hand on his son’s shoulder and said, slowly and emphatically :

“ You may rest assured of this, my lad—there is not much ability required to qualify any man to be *your* teacher. *You* need feeding with milk, if any one ever did. How many times had you heard him,” he continued, “ before you concluded that he was not suitable for Oxbury ?”

“ Oh ! three or four Sundays.”

“ Is that all ? You did not wait long, then. If you had heard him for twelve months, now, you might have found reason to modify or to entirely change your opinion. I wish you had exercised a little more patience, especially before taking such extreme measures. Wiser men than you have found out that there is good stuff in him. But I don’t expect you will ever alter *your* opinion, for you are as obstinate as a mule.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## ALBERT WINSTOCK'S OPINION.

GRANGE STREET CHAPEL was no longer desolate. The congregations which flocked to it every Sunday evening were now sufficiently large to stimulate poor Mr. Holland and his friends to great exertions, and to dispel doubt and uneasiness. The injurious reports that had been circulated, and the various efforts made by the minister's foes, instead of diminishing had really increased the number of his hearers. While Mr. Staggers and his clique were wandering hither and thither, and found no resting-place, Mr. Holland's followers professed to be rejoicing in "the life, the energy, and the power of his ministrations," and loudly

declared that the seceders were labouring under a fatal hallucination. There were times, it is true—on Sunday mornings especially—when the chapel was but poorly attended, and it was then that the absence of the dissentients was most sorely lamented and their return most ardently desired.

As to the best means of securing their return the minister held many consultations with Roger Garrel, who was now his chosen adviser and nearest friend. With the deacons Mr. Holland could not converse with any freedom, though there were stated times when he and Mr. Flint discussed church matters together.

Garrel was on the point of starting from home in order to fulfil the engagement made with Albert Winstock on the previous day when the minister was shown into his front sitting-room. Here they were closeted together for a considerable time, and it was nearly eight o'clock when at length the brewer knocked at Albert Winstock's door. It was a cold night, but in the heavens there were myriads of stars visible, and

Garrel mentally contrasted their sublime calm with the tumult and disorder that prevailed at Grange Street. When he passed into the mansion he felt some slight trepidation, as he reflected on the possible consequences of his visit. The social position of Albert Winstock was superior to his own, and there were various other reasons why on the present occasion he should display unusual prudence and caution. He girded himself, therefore, as he stepped into the inner room where the master of the house awaited his coming.

"You are late," said Albert Winstock, as the visitor smilingly, but with some little nervousness, took the seat indicated to him. "I have been expecting you a long time."

"Business, Mr. Winstock, business," said Garrel blandly and respectfully. "I am only a working brewer, and can't call a minute my own."

Then there was a silence, during which the master of the house waited until the visitor should become suitably influenced by his surroundings.

It was a well-furnished room certainly ; and Garrel, as his eye wandered from the rich carpet at his feet to the large marble carved mantelpiece, on which were some very handsome bronzes and a buhl clock, and thence travelled over the luxurious ottomans and couches, and the expensive trifles which were reflected by lofty mirrors on every side, felt that it would be a good thing if this opulent young man could be induced to regard Mr. Holland with favour. Albert Winstock, in the meantime, was thinking how desirable it was that the brewer should be brought over to his party. The former broke the silence by saying :

“ You will have to shut the chapel up altogether if things go on like this, Mr. Garrel.”

“ I hope not, sir,” returned the brewer, “ for that would be a great calamity.”

“ But what is the use keeping it open ? Do you expect that those who have left will ever come back to you ?”

“ Our aim is to induce them to do so.”

“ What, come back, and sit under Mr. Holland ?”

"Yes; that is what we want."

"They will never do it. It is out of the question. If you wish them to return you must have a new minister."

"But if Mr. Holland left, half the congregation would leave with him," said Garrel. "Several persons have assured me that if he is driven away by any ill-treatment, they will never enter the chapel again as long as they live."

"Do they mean it, do you think?"

"I am sure they do. I never saw people so much in earnest in my life."

"But Mr. Holland is going to leave on his own accord, it appears."

"Is he?" said the brewer, lifting his bushy eyebrows, and smiling incredulously.

"I am told so," replied Albert Winstock, "by those who heard it from his own lips."

"That is news to me, I must confess," said Garrel thoughtfully. "Do you refer to what our pastor said at Larberry's house the other day?"

"Yes. On that occasion he said that as

there was so much opposition he had made up his mind to leave next midsummer."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Winstock," said the brewer politely. "You have been misinformed. I was present on that occasion myself, and heard every word Mr. Holland spoke."

"And did he not make the promise I have mentioned?"

"Certainly not, sir. What he said was this—that if the seceders would all return, and give him a fair hearing until midsummer, he would then put himself in the hands of the church, either to be retained or dismissed."

"That is a very different account from the one I have received from others," said Albert Winstock.

"Mine is the correct account, then. May I ask from whom you received the other?"

"From Mr. Snooley; and I don't think he would tell a falsehood."

To this remark Garrel made no reply, and after an awkward pause Albert Winstock said :

"You are going to lose Mr. Gloss, I hear."

"Yes, it appears so," replied the brewer, with much suavity.

"Don't you think a good many persons will go over to Peeble's Lane along with him?"

"No; I don't expect that our attendance will be materially affected by that circumstance."

"But if they should do so, they will still wish their names to be retained on your church-book, will they not?" said Albert.

"Yes, they will," replied Garrel. "I cannot help saying, however," he continued, "that in my judgment it ought not to be allowed. If they withdraw from us they ought not to be suffered to continue members, since they abuse the privilege by coming to raise a disturbance at our business meetings."

"But you have no law provided for such cases."

"True; but we can make one."

"Ah! I tell you what it is, Mr. Garrel

—going on as you are, you will find your difficulties multiply at every step you take. You had better leave Mr. Holland, and then he will be obliged to resign, and there will be an end to our differences."

"Never!" said the brewer firmly.

"Well, at any rate you will grant me the favour I am going to ask."

"What is that?" said Garrel, his manly countenance becoming somewhat clouded.

"Why, we want to make an offer to Mr. Holland through you."

"Indeed! May I ask what is the nature of the offer?"

"I scarcely know how to put it to you," said Albert Winstock; "but a few of us have been talking the matter over, and we thought that Mr. Holland would probably accept a sum of money."

"Not from you, Mr. Winstock," said the brewer, with a pleasant smile; "nor from anybody else who offered it as a condition of his resignation, I am quite sure."

"Wouldn't he take fifty pounds?"

"No," said Garrel, "nor a hundred

either. He has made up his mind to stay, and no sum you could offer would induce him to alter his decision."

"Still," said Albert Winstock, "if you don't object, I should like you to name it to him."

"Well, I will do so since you wish it," said the brewer reluctantly; "but you may rest satisfied that he will not accede to your terms." And then, after a pause, he added, "Would you mind stepping across with me to Mr. Staggers' ? There is something I have to say to him which I want you to hear."

"Is it something bearing on this matter we have been talking about ?"

"Yes. Mr. Holland is desirous of coming to some arrangement with your party, and he has instructed me to make *you* an offer."

"What a curious coincidence," said Albert Winstock. "I will go with you with pleasure."

A quarter of an hour afterwards they were seated in Mr. Staggers' parlour. Reclining at his ease on a couch near the

window, and his features wearing a more acrid and cynical expression than usual, the trustee seemed by no means eager to enter upon the business in hand.

“So you have come with a message from the minister, have you, Mr. Garrel?” he said, tapping his snuff-box, and deliberately taking a pinch. “You are a rising man, Mr. Garrel,” he continued, with a sneer. “You have already risen to the dignity of a plenipotentiary; you will probably soon become a deacon.”

“Not while you are connected with Grange Street, Mr. Staggers,” returned the brewer good-humouredly; “you have ability and experience far greater than I possess.”

“But, you see,” said Mr. Staggers, “I am not honoured with Holland’s friendship as you are.”

“To put it in other words,” replied Garrel, with a smile, “you have not thought fit hitherto to regard him with any favour; but we hope, Mr. Staggers, that it will not always be so. No one

laments the disruption that has taken place in our church more than I do, and I long to see a change for the better."

"To be sure; so we all do," said Albert Winstock.

"If you are so anxious for union, Mr. Garrel," growled the trustee, striking his stick on the floor, "why, in the name of common sense, don't you help us drive Mr. Holland away?"

"For this simple reason," replied the brewer, "that I will never be a party to an act of injustice, and that would be the grossest piece of injustice ever perpetrated."

"I don't see that at all," said Albert Winstock, "because we offer him ample compensation. I have been telling Mr. Garrel," he continued, addressing the trustee, "that we are willing to give him fifty pounds."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Staggers, "we would give him a hundred, and welcome."

"I shall not advise him to accept it," said Garrel.

“Perhaps he will not require much persuasion,” retorted Staggers. “But never mind that. What is this offer that you have been instructed to make to us?”

“Well,” said the brewer, “I can put it in a very few words. You know as well as I do that Mr. Holland commenced his work here under great disadvantages; and you also know that people who never come to hear our pastor preach are not likely to be such good judges of his sermons as those who sit under him constantly. Bearing those two things in mind, and also remembering that in all respects he has decidedly improved since the time when he first settled among us, would it not be well, I ask, for the different parties to reunite, and give him a fair trial? He has asked me to make to you, in his name, the same proposal as that he made himself at our friend Larberry’s house the other night. Come back and give him your support for a little while, and then, should he be found unsuited to the place, he will at once resign. We well know the influence you possess

over the minds of the seceders, and if you would call them together, and recommend them to accept this offer, we have no doubt they would do so."

A sardonic smile was playing about the trustee's lips while Garrel spoke, and he now said :

" My influence is not so great as you seem to imagine, and, even if it were, I would not use it in the manner you suggest. I have only one word to say in reply to your proposal, and it is this, that I will not entertain it for a moment. I have now dismissed the subject, and I wish you good-evening."

So saying, Mr. Staggers rose, as did also Albert Winstock and the brewer, who shook hands with the trustee, and at once left the house together.

" You see," said Albert Winstock to Garrel as they parted company in the street, " it is useless to attempt to turn him, so you have no other course but to give way, and let us, who are gentlemen, have the rule."

## CHAPTER VII.

## DAME CROCK.

“THAT’s what I was told, mum. I can’t say how true it is, for there has been such a many stories passed round, about one thing or another, that I don’t know what to believe, which I do say, when we see such sickness about us, and so many as hasn’t got bread to eat, it’s a pity people don’t occipy theirselves in doin’ all the good they can, instid of telling tales ; but the action is so like Mr. Todd that I can’t help thinkin’ he actually did advise it, and may I be forgiven if I do him wrong, which I wouldn’t mention it without proof, only I think you and Mr. Holland should be put

upon your guard, since forewarned is fore-armed, as the sayin' is."

Having thus far delivered herself, Dame Crock planted her basket more firmly upon her knees, gave one comprehensive glance round the minister's sitting-room, in which there was no auditor except Kate, who was listening attentively, and proceeded :

" The person as told me, mum, got it from a church-member as is likely to know the truth about it ; so it seems pretty clear that Mr. Todd and Mr. Staggers, between them, have found out a way for keepin' Mr. Holland out of the rents of the chapel property. Mr. Todd went to the trustee and told him that there was new drainage-pipes wanted to the chapel-houses. They are not wanted at all, but Mr. Staggers is goin' to have 'em laid in, which the outlay will swallow up the rents for a long time to come. But there is One above who will protect our minister ; and as for them, they will injure themselves more than they'll injure him. As the sayin' is, ' Those who sow thorns, let them not walk barefoot.' "

“ I should think,” said Kate, “ Mr. Staggers will not have it done, unless it is absolutely necessary.”

“ He ought not to, mum, but I’m afraid he will ; and if so, it will be a wonderful expense, takin’ up all the old pipes and puttin’ new ones down, which the charge they make is never moderate in chapel property. ‘ Men cut broad thongs out of other men’s leather,’ as the sayin’ is. It’s a most astonishin’ thing, mum, that some of our church-members should act in the mean, wicked way they do ; and yet they have the face to say our minister is guided by self-interest, and that he is fightin’ and workin’ for himself, rather than for the honour of his Master ! A pretty thing for *them* to say ; and Mr. Gloss has a good deal to answer for, being too free with his tongue, although he is our senior deacon ; but he is goin’ to leave us, and somebody else will have to be chosen in his place.”

“ I suppose so,” said Mrs. Holland.

“ Yes, mum,” continued the dame, with increasing animation. “ Mr. Flint said to

me the other day, 'We must have another deacon, Mrs. Crock, and the church must proceed to the election without delay.' Those was his very words."

"It is not surprising," remarked Kate, "that Mr. Flint should wish for assistance in his duties."

"No, mum, it isn't; but he thinks that one beside himself will be sufficient, our church being small, and the question, mum, is, who is the member most likely to be chosen? Our party, of course, wants one that will work pleasantly with our minister, so that good may be done; but I fear that the others will muster all their strength, and try to push one of *their* men in. So we may expect a desperate struggle. What a pity they won't let us alone! We are workin' harmoniously among ourselves, and the blessin' of God is upon us. Why don't they either leave us altogether, or else fall in and put their shoulder to the wheel?"

"I wish they would do one or the other," said Kate, "with all my heart."

"Certainly, mum, and so do all who want

to see the cause prosper. Now if we can get a good deacon in, all will be well."

"Mr. Holland," said Kate, "thinks that Mr. Garrel is as eligible a person as any one in the church."

"Just the very man, mum," cried the dame ecstatically, "that I had in my own mind! He would do beautiful."

"Or Mr. Crock," added Kate dubiously.

"Crock is a good man, mum," said the dame, pleased that her husband's name should be mentioned, "and he would do his best; but," she continued decisively, "he is no scholard, and would make a poor hand in such an office; so he must not be thought of, if you will allow me to say so. So now let us think who the other side are likely to choose. There is Copperfox, for one."

"Yes, he would get some votes."

"Well, then there is Mr. Snooley. If they think *him* fit for such an office—and several of them do, mum, I know—why, all I have to say is, their taste is not my taste. The other two who stand some

chance are Amos Flint and Mr. Clatts. Now I look at it as this, mum—the church would do wrong to choose either of these four, because they have all done the cause a great injury, and are even doin' all they can to injure it at the present time; for they entice people away from the chapel, and do all they can to prevent fresh ones coming. You should hear, mum, how everybody in the town laughs and sneers at them."

"I am aware," said Kate, "that public opinion here is strongly in favour of my husband, and that the proceedings of his opponents are universally condemned."

"To be sure they are, mum, and no wonder. People that look on can often judge of a game better than the players themselves. Mr. Staggers and the rest of them hoped that the respectable inhabitants would have cried our minister down, and would have said, 'Oh, he only stays because he's afraid of losing his position.' But instead of that they all take his part, and feel glad that he bears up as he does. I

don't say it's right, mum, that they should poke fun at the Todds, and the rest of them, in the way they do; but of Sundays the townsfolk watch them as they turn down the muddy lane to the Methodist Chapel, instead of coming to Grange Street, and jeer at them. And I'm sure the Methodists show them the cold shoulder; for they say, 'People that turn their own place upside down are not wanted here.' What is most unaccountable to me is, that them as picked at Mr. Holland the most because he married a Church lady, should now be seen going into the Church theirselves almost every Sunday. But never mind; I feel sure they will soon be tired of their goings on, and then they will return to Grange Street. Did you hear what the little boy wrote on Mr. Todd's door, mum?"

"No, Mrs. Crock. What was it?"

"It was very imperant of him, and very unbecoming, whoever the boy was, but for all that I couldn't help laughing when I heard about it. You know what a way Mr. Todd has of swaggering about with

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his arm under his coat-tail? Well, one mornin' this week he found these words chalked up on his front door:

“‘‘ Little Bo-peep has strayed from the sheep,  
And we didn’t know where to find him ;  
But let him alone—  
He’ll soon come home,—  
And bring his coat-tail behind him.’’

“ That lad would get a good whipping if Mr. Todd could find him out, and I don’t say but what he would deserve it.”

“ I suppose, mum, that Johanna Todd and her sister Esther are still teachers in the Sunday School ?” inquired the dame.

“ Yes ; they are,” said Kate.

“ Then I think it would be far better if they wasn’t ; for as they never attend service at the chapel, and speak against our minister as they do, the children can’t learn what is good from such examples. But the Todds *will* attend our chapel to-morrow, no doubt, as a strange minister is comin’ to preach. Are you goin’ to entertain him at your house, mum, if I may make bold to ask ?”

“Yes,” replied Kate, “Mr. Rugge will dine here.”

“You will be sure to see Mr. Staggers and the rest of them back in their old places, mum, and your feelings will be hurt by remarks you will hear them make; but I hope you will bear up as well as you can. There are those,” continued the dame, who had now risen and was leaving the house, “who will do you a great injury, if it is possible; but never mind: *they* will be the sufferers in the end, not *you*. Harm watch, harm catch, as the sayin’ is. Good-bye, mum, and God bless you.”

On the morning of the next day, which was Sunday, Mr. Rugge arrived at the chapel-house. It should be stated that the pastors in the neighbourhood were on good terms with poor Mr. Holland, and had recently elected him a member of their “Fraternal Association.” They also encouraged his friends to support him in his difficulties. The young minister esteemed them greatly, for they were men of undoubted piety, considerable erudition, and

genial manners. Mr. Rugge, however, who had not been admitted to the "Association," was unlike his brethren in several important respects.

"I met Mr. Holland on his way to my chapel," he said to Kate, "and I hope his labours there will be blessed."

The two ministers were exchanging pulpits, Mr. Rugge's chapel being situated in a village within walking distance of Oxbury.

"It is close upon eleven," continued Mr. Rugge, looking at his watch. Kate noticed that he was a tall, powerful man, with large heavy features, and intensely black hair which reached down to his shoulders. "We will go into the chapel at once, if you please," he said.

A minute or two afterwards the minister entered the pulpit, and the service commenced. Kate, sitting in her pew, could see that Mr. Staggers and Mr. Copperfox, and in fact all the disaffected, were present, and prepared to enjoy the sermon to the utmost. Albert Winstock and his wife,

whose pew was immediately in front of her own, were settling themselves in order to be especially attentive. This fact was the more noticeable, because the deportment of this couple on ordinary occasions was by no means remarkable for its propriety.

Christmas Evans once said : “ Were we to attempt to describe Satan, the enemy of all truth, righteousness, godliness, spiritual edification, and devotional feeling in the worshippers of God, as a ‘ hearer ’ of the Gospel—if we could but imagine him in human form among our congregations, we should suppose that he would take his seat in some conspicuous place beneath the pulpit or on the gallery, where he might be well seen by the congregation. Then he would close his eyes, pretending to be asleep, and he would especially avoid the slightest expression of interest or pleasure. But he would now and then intimate, by a certain glance of the eye when he opened it, and by a significant shake of the head, his displeasure and contempt, to get the rest of the assembly into the same dia-

bolical temper as himself." Something like that, we fancy, would be the conduct of the enemy of souls in a place of worship. Have we not seen some professors of religion exactly like him ?

Yes. There were several such professors at Grange Street. Albert Winstock was one of them ; his wife was another. While poor Mr. Holland was preaching, the former would testify his indifference by every possible gesture ; and the latter would toy with her gloves or her jewelled ring, read, converse with her children—in short, do anything except listen to the sermon ; and as their pew was a very conspicuous one, it was easy to imagine the effect such conduct would produce upon the congregation. Albert Winstock had no special liking for Mr. Rugge—indeed he afterwards pronounced his sermon "a bore ;" nevertheless he thought proper not to be inattentive this morning. Kate did not need to be told his reasons, for they were sufficiently obvious.

The occasion was a special one, for Mr.

Rugge had been engaged to preach on behalf of the Sunday School, the superintendent having considered him the fittest man for the purpose, because of his known hostility to all religious bodies except his own. This morning, Mr. Rugge amply fulfilled the expectations of his friends, who rubbed their hands with glee as he denounced one denomination after another, and showed how evidently insincere they all were in their respective beliefs and practices, and how certain it was that his hearers and himself enjoyed a monopoly of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Mr. Rugge, be it remembered, was, in respect of his want of catholicity, unlike most of his ministerial brethren in the neighbourhood. Several of them had frequently taken him to task for his meretricious diatribes, and one pastor in particular once said to him: “The essence of ‘the man of sin’ is infallibility; let any man or party, in any way or in anything, claim to be infallible—that man or that party becomes really popish, however zeal-

ously they may protest against the Pope of Rome. I think I heartily detest this spirit, whether in Rome or elsewhere ; but of the two I like it best in his Holiness, for he has antiquity in his favour, and asserts his claims more honestly. He professes them openly, while the others would repudiate them."

In the afternoon, Mr. Rugge was triumphantly taken into the schoolroom, where he distributed the annual reward books to the children, the superintendent in the meantime looking on with approval, and the Miss Todds, also, testifying their admiration with many smiles and tears.

In the evening the opposition party again mustered a large force in the chapel, and were edified by sundry anathemas which the preacher hurled at the Established Church in general, and the parish church of Oxbury in particular : and thus the anniversary services at Grange Street came to an end.

As the assembly was dispersing, Mr. Copperfox—his eyes glistening with exulta-

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tion—shook hands with old Crock and said:

“ This is something like! It has been a joyful day. This is what we ought to see every Sunday.”

Reuben Crock knew what he meant, but with unresponsive bluntness replied :

“ There be matters, Mr. Copperfox, on which you and me will never agree, and this be one of them.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### “MY MIND IS MADE UP, SIR.”

MR. GLOSS having resolved to abide by his letter of resignation, and a successor being required, it was needful to make arrangements for the election. Accordingly, on the following evening, Mr. Flint called upon the minister by appointment, to confer with him upon this important subject. Mr. Flint was in these days much less distant and cold towards his chief, but still the deacon was in great perplexity. On the one hand he saw a strong opposition party, to which he had hitherto given his hearty sympathy ; and on the other, he perceived that the sayings and doings of that party were regarded with abhorrence, not only

by Mr. Holland's immediate followers, but also by all the other religious bodies in the town, and by the ministers of the vicinity. He had discovered that Mr. Holland was respected by the townsfolk, that his manifold labours were beginning to bear good fruit, that it was confidently believed he had been divinely sent among them, and that he (Mr. Flint) was condemned for having been on the side of mischief-makers like Mr. Copperfox and Mr. Staggers. But the deacon had his reputation for consistency to maintain. It would never do to eat his own words—at any rate, not at present; therefore he still outwardly maintained nearly the same position he had taken up upon Mr. Holland's marriage. Having a narrow intellect, and no imagination, it was hard for him to believe he could make a serious mistake. The deacon “adored justice, and dwelt much upon the punishment of evil-doers. He was willing to be punished himself if he did wrong; but then, did he ever do wrong?” Mr. Flint had a name for being

a most conscientious man, and certainly none could be more particular, more strict, more religious, than he was. People were somewhat afraid of him, he was so austere. And then, who could make greater sacrifices of time, labour, and money than he did on behalf of the cause at Grange Street? But the deacon was apt to forget that “there may be fasting without repentance; the words of prayer without its spirit; much given and much done for our sect, party, or church, yet nothing done for God; proselytism and bringing persons to ourselves, yet no bringing of them to God; the idolatry of a religious system with practical atheism.”

In many respects, therefore, his character presented a striking contrast to that of Mr. Holland, who loved the religion that believeth all things, hopeth all things. With so little in common, no wonder their consultations were not always mutually satisfactory.

Seated uncomfortably upon the edge of a chair, opposite to the minister, Mr. Flint

looked steadily at the table, and remarked in a mournful voice :

“ I am very sorry, sir, that Mr. Gloss has felt it his duty to leave us. We can ill spare him. He was a man who always insisted upon a correct creed above all things, and who was never tired of upholding our tenets. He well deserves a testimonial from us.”

“ Well, you know, it has been decided to give him one,” said Mr. Holland.

“ Yes,” said the deacon, moving uneasily in his chair, and speaking in a hesitating manner. “ It will be presented next Sabbath fortnight, which will be his last day among us. The teachers thought, sir, *you* would perhaps desire to make the presentation in our name.”

“ I have not the slightest objection.”

“ Then we will consider it settled, sir,” said Mr. Flint.

“ With regard to the election that is to take place at the next church meeting,” said the minister—“ you are quite sure one new deacon will be sufficient?”

“Yes, sir, decidedly.”

“And you also think that the voting should take place without a previous nomination?”

“We have never been accustomed to nominations here, sir. The church-members at once proceed to vote for whomsoever they think fit. I don’t think we had better depart from our usual practice.”

Mr. Flint loved the old ways; besides, he remembered Copperfox’s warning about the black gown and the Prayer-book. This might be the thin end of the wedge. It was his duty to shield the church, and to resist the slightest innovation.

“You have never made use of what is called ‘the exhaustive vote,’ have you?” asked the minister.

“No, sir; I never heard of it before. But supposing there are four persons voted for, the one who has obtained the highest number of votes is the one elected.”

“I supposed so. I thought I would ask your advice, you have had so much more experience than I. My idea was this: the

candidate—if I may call him by that name—who obtains the lowest number of votes should retire from the contest, until only two remained. A division should again be taken respecting these two, and on the result being known, it should be proposed and seconded that he who had obtained the greater number of votes be elected to the diaconate. Probably the voting would then be unanimous, and, if so, it would greatly promote that deacon's efficiency. Don't you think so?"

Mr. Flint had not a compliant disposition. He was a man of strong will, able to control himself, and fond of exercising control over others. He was not likely to adopt any suggestion of the minister's.

"We have never conducted our elections in that way," he said, "and I do not think, sir, it would be advisable to make any change."

"Very well—just as you like. May I ask what member you think most eligible for the office? It is almost Hobson's choice with us, you see," continued Mr. Holland,

looking with a smile into the stern countenance of his subordinate; "there are only two or three males from whom a selection can be made."

Mr. Flint rarely committed himself to a direct assent to any observation of the minister's, but it was safe and soothing to his feelings to reply :

"We have lost a good many members since Mr. Bathosley's time."

"There is our old friend Crock," said the minister, taking no notice of the last remark. "He is getting old and feeble, however, and, though a very pious man, is scarcely adapted for a deacon."

Mr. Flint made no remark, but still kept his immovable countenance turned towards the table. Mr. Holland proceeded :

"You would not recommend your cousin Amos, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Nor Mr. Larberry?"

"Most certainly not, sir; and I do not think many of the friends are likely to vote for him, he is so unstable."

“What do you think, then, of Mr. Garrel?” asked the minister nervously. He expected his interlocutor would raise an objection, but was anxious to carry his point if possible.

“Mr. Garrel, sir,” said the deacon, raising his hands, while fire flashed suddenly from his eyes, “would, in my humble opinion, be unsuitable.”

“May I ask why?”

“Because of his calling, sir.”

“Under the circumstances,” said Mr. Holland, “do you consider that an insuperable objection?”

“I do, sir; and what is more, you will find that most, if not all the members, are of my opinion. They would not think of voting for a brewer.”

“What I am concerned about now,” said the minister, “is to obtain your own opinion. Mr. Garrel’s occupation is against him certainly; otherwise I think he has every qualification. I must say he is the man I should choose myself. I know no other so eligible.”

“But his wife is not a church-member,” urged Mr. Flint.

“Granted; but that is not a condition imposed by the New Testament. Let me read the passages to you.”

Mr. Holland then read them over, explaining each verse as he went along.

“It is ‘deaconess,’ you perceive, not deacon’s wife,” he said.

“If you were to talk to me till midnight, sir, you would not alter my views,” said the inexorable deacon. “Mr. Garrel’s calling as a brewer renders him totally unfit for the office, and that opinion I shall always hold.”

“I own,” said the minister, “that I wish he followed a different business; but still, consider how peculiar the circumstances are. And then, why should his calling disqualify him, when it is not considered a sufficient reason for debarring him from the privileges of membership? He is a man, too, who would work well with us.”

“It is no use talking, sir; I say again he is not an eligible person.”

"Whom would you suggest, then?" asked Mr. Holland despairingly.

"Well," said the deacon, "I shall give my support either to Mr. Snooley or to Mr. Copperfox."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Flint."

"Very likely you are, sir; but I shall vote for one of them, nevertheless."

"Don't you think Mr. Snooley is too young and inexperienced?" asked the minister. "And remember, he is not on friendly terms with me, and is seldom seen at chapel. I do not wish to recall unpleasant scenes, but we cannot quite forget the past. On several accounts, that I need not mention, he would not be at all suitable. And the same may be said of Mr. Copperfox."

"Mr. Snooley, sir," said the deacon, "is a very dear friend of mine, and so is Mr. Copperfox. They are both men of correct views, and are exceedingly zealous for the truth. Only the other day they faithfully exposed the errors and fallacies of the Wesleyans; and they have a proper horror of the Established Church."

“I have no doubt of it,” said Mr. Holland; “and for that very reason neither of them ought to be elected. I put it to you, Mr. Flint: have we not had enough of squabbling and bickering at Grange Street?”

“Yes, sir, we have; more than enough.”

“And have not the disagreements among us made our church meetings notorious in the town?”

“They have, sir.”

“Well, then, once more: Does not every person in Oxbury point to Mr. Copperfox, and say of him, ‘*He* is the cause of these quarrels; and if it were not for *him*, the church meetings would be orderly and creditable?’”

“I admit that those remarks have been made, sir,” said the deacon reluctantly.

“Well, then,” continued Mr. Holland, “how can a man who promotes division, and whose heart, I am afraid, is filled with hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, be a fit and proper person for this office? If you are so afraid that mischief might arise

from the election of Mr. Garrel, because he is a brewer, how much more reason is there to fear that our church will become a byword, should Mr. Snooley or Mr. Copperfox be chosen!"

The deacon was immovable.

"I have told you before, sir," he said, "that my mind is made up. Nothing you have said has changed my opinions in the least."

"Then we must leave the matter for the church-members to decide," said Mr. Holland; "and whatever their decision may be, I shall of course accept it."

Mr. Flint had now risen. As he was passing out at the door, he said :

"I have no idea which way the voting will go, sir; but I trust the church will be guided aright."

"Yes," said the minister; "I hope it will."

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SEVEN STARS.

THE reader may remember that when Mr. Maxforth left Scamborough, he had formed a purpose regarding Miss Vaveley, which he intended to carry into effect immediately after reaching home; that is to say, he meant to write and make her an offer of his hand and heart. He afterwards be-thought himself, however, that he had said nothing in any of the interviews they had had, to prepare her for such a letter. Might it not be risking an unfavourable reply, if he should take her by surprise? Might she not think the step was premature, and prefer to be wooed before acknowledging she was won? It was not improbable; and therefore he contented himself

at present by writing a polite note to Mrs. Vaveley, in which he referred to the delightful evening he had spent at her house, and asked to be very kindly remembered to her daughter ; adding that he would be in the neighbourhood of Scamborough again very shortly, and hoped she would allow him the pleasure of making a second call upon her. He then set about making his arrangements at home and in the parish for another visit to Sestwick. He found he could not possibly leave his duties before Monday, and in the meantime he received a communication from Mr. Praxton. The Rector had asked his friend to come to Oxbury and preach for him some time in April or May, to which Mr. Praxton had replied that he could not give him a definite promise then, but would write and fix a date as soon as he was able. The letter stated that he hoped to be in Oxbury in the first week in May. Mr. Praxton also made sundry allusions from which the Rector inferred that matters had not gone well with his friend

at the cottage on Seftwick Green. In fact he felt convinced that the Vicar of St. Jude's had asked Miss Vaveley to be his wife, and that she had refused him. If so, all the better for himself. He was not altogether surprised; but at all events there apparently remained no obstacle to his own success in that quarter. The Rector preached two sermons on the next Sunday with a good courage; and when he looked at the squire's crimson-curtained pew, where sat Mr. Cornford and his two daughters, he told himself that he would willingly brave all the consequences, if the minister's sister-in-law would only consent to be his wife; and that, notwithstanding any difficulties or complications that might arise in the parish, he would be happier with her than even Emily Cornford could have made him, had she become the mistress of the Rectory. The squire's daughter was an agreeable girl; but she had not taken his heart captive, and he for his part was thankful that he had never played with her affections. These thoughts would intrude

upon the young priest, even during the services of that day; nevertheless he honestly threw himself into his work, and bent his mind and soul to the prayers Mr. Peake read with so much reverence and distinctness. We have said Mr. Maxforth preached his sermons with a good courage. Perhaps he himself was hardly aware how much the hopefulness within him contributed to his earnestness. He *was* hopeful, certainly; and when he left Oxbury the next morning, and the train was carrying him northwards, he really believed he would return an accepted suitor. The Rector did not reach the Seven Stars, Seftwick, until rather late in the evening, and having established himself for the night at that comfortable hostelry, he set himself seriously to re-consider the step he was about to take. Of course he could not call at the cottage until the next day. How long he might remain in this bleak village would depend upon the progress he was able to make in his suit. At all events he would not leave it until his fate was de-

cided, and Miss Vaveley had either rejected or accepted him. He got but little sleep that night, for the roaring of the sea and the howling of the wind, added to the excitement in his own mind, rendered sleep well-nigh impossible. Several times he started up, wondering that in such a frightful tempest the inmates were not moving about in alarm; but in the morning the landlord assured him it had been an unusually quiet night, adding that if his guest were to stay until March, he would hear a "vast o' wind that would aboot tak' all the chimneys doon." The Rector fervently hoped he would be able to get away from the place before that awful month arrived.

After a while the wind abated and the sun began to shine. When he had breakfasted, he started for a walk upon the beach, for the tide was out and the weather was now delightful. He did not intend to call at the cottage until the afternoon. He was walking leisurely along when, at a sudden bend of the coast, he caught sight of a female figure a few yards ahead of

him that sent a thrill through all his limbs, and made his heart beat furiously. It was Violet. Her back was towards him, and she was stepping slowly, gazing upon the sea. After a moment's consideration, he advanced rapidly and silently towards her, and, raising his hat, accosted her with a tremulous and husky "good-morning." A start—a blush—and a sweet smile, told the young man that his appearance—unexpected though it might be—was not unwelcome. Attempting an excuse—it was a very lame one, as he was conscious—for being at Seftwick so soon again, he commenced a conversation as they walked side by side along the sands, and by-and-by they both forgot their nervousness.

"We can see Torwick and Eskham plainly this morning," he said, as they looked across the bay.

"Yes," she answered, "the atmosphere is very clear."

"I remember our conversation the other night," he continued, "and I looked for the

smoke of the furnace-fires as soon as I got to the coast yesterday."

"Did you?" returned Violet simply.

"I have not forgotten the names of the towns either," he said, laughing.

"So I perceived. Your memory is very exact."

They were now passing the lifeboat shed, and the Rector said he wondered if the lifeboat had ever been called out for service in the summer-time.

"Yes; a fisherman told me it was called out once last July."

"A sudden squall, I suppose?"

"The fisherman said so."

"Was it a foreign vessel?" asked Mr. Maxforth.

"No; it was a boat crossing the bay from Eskham."

"I have never seen a lifeboat out in my life," said the Rector, who was destined however to witness that sight before many months had passed.

When Mr. Maxforth at length parted from his fair companion he asked per-

mission to call at the cottage that afternoon, adding that he had brought with him from Oxbury a little book on church architecture for Mrs. Vaveley, which he would beg her to accept. Violet, of course, thanked him, and hoped he would come, as her mamma would be delighted to see him. The Rector thought he had made a fair beginning that morning, and he returned to the Seven Stars in a hopeful frame of mind. He ate his luncheon in the quiet, modest room upstairs, telling himself meanwhile that he must not continue to beat about the bush. On the first opportunity that offered itself it would be well to come to the point at once. Accordingly, although somewhat perturbed and anxious as he crossed the green that afternoon, he was resolved to bring matters to an issue without delay.

He received a warm welcome in the little sitting-room, and Mrs. Vaveley accepted his trifling present with many thanks and smiles. Being asked to stay and take tea with them, he readily consented, and two or three hours were spent in pleasant

chat. After tea Mrs. Vaveley, who no doubt divined the young man's wishes, stated that she had an engagement in the village that would keep her for about a quarter of an hour, and she must go. She implored him, however, to remain with Violet until her return. Here was the very opportunity he wanted, and of course he replied yes, he would stay. When they were left alone he said :

“ Will you allow me to speak to you upon a subject that has been on my mind for some time ? ”

Violet's colour came and went, but she said nothing ; only her breathing was quicker, and she turned her head a little away from him.

“ You *must* have seen, Miss Vavey—Violet, that I have long loved you. I *do* love you devotedly—passionately,” he said, taking her hand. “ I have come, Violet, to ask you to be my wife,” the Rector continued, striving to retain the hand which she gently withdrew from him.

“ Mr. Maxforth,” she said, looking down

and speaking in a low, tremulous voice, “you are indeed kind and good to make me this offer—but I cannot hesitate for a moment to tell you that it is impossible.”

“Surely you will not deny me,” he urged. “I have loved you, and you only, ever since the day I first saw you.”

“I fervently thank you for saying so; but, Mr. Maxforth, I cannot, and will not, be your wife. Have you considered, for one thing, that my sister has married the dissenting minister in your parish?”

“Yes,” he said; “but that need not signify. I have thought of all that, and have counted the cost in every way. I will brave anything, everything, Violet, if you will be my wife.”

“No,” she answered firmly; “my mind will not change. It would be madness.”

“Oh, Violet, I cannot give you up.”

“Mr. Maxforth,” she said earnestly, “think of your position, think of your people. The circumstances are so peculiar.

Your work with your parishioners would be hindered——”

“No, Violet; why should it?”

“But I cannot doubt it,” she replied; “and then—my sister.”

“Your sister would be glad.”

“Yes, glad in one sense; but would her husband’s difficulties be lightened, Mr. Maxforth? Oh, it is folly to think of it.”

“I have told you, Violet,” he said, again taking her hand, “that I love you ardently. Do you love me?”

She blushed crimson, but answered:

“It is causing me unnecessary pain to ask me, when it is so plain that I can never be your wife;” and a second time she disengaged her hand.

“But your fears may be imaginary, and might never be realised,” he said.

“My sister has told me that their people suspect her husband of leanings towards the Church of England. Would it be sisterly conduct on my part to consent to that which they would regard as a confirmation of their suspicion?”

He did not reply, and she continued :

“ He wishes to win over his people, and bring them, if he can, to a better mind. You know that, I think ?”

“ Yes,” he said ; “ I know that.”

“ Well, then, I could not consent to that which would unsettle his people and frustrate the purpose he has formed. My sister would justly despise me if I did.”

“ You speak as though you did not love me.”

“ I— Mr. Maxforth, I shall never marry any one. My mother is living here among strangers, far from all our friends, and I am her only companion. While she lives I would not leave her on any consideration. I shall *never* marry.”

“ Truly, you have brought a formidable array of objections,” he said bitterly. “ Your sister, and her husband, and your mother, and the Dissenters of Oxbury—all are obstacles to my happiness. Is *your heart* fighting against me too, Violet ?”

“ I should prove no true friend to you if I accepted your offer,” she replied, smiling

sweetly. "My heart is fighting for you when I show that your happiness and usefulness will never be promoted by my consenting to what would be wrong and unsisterly."

"At any rate, then," he urged, "you will let me hope that I may one day win your consent. I will wait, if you will say I may hope."

"I do not bid you hope," she replied; "it is not at all likely the time will ever come when I shall give you a different answer."

"May I ask why not, Violet?"

"Because it is not at all likely the circumstances will alter," she replied.

"They might."

"But consider, Mr. Maxforth," she said, "my sister has told me her husband means to stay at Oxbury for years, and will not leave it until his purpose is accomplished. My mother too, I hope, will live for years, and you will continue to be Rector of Oxbury. Can I bid you hope these 'obstacles' will all be removed?"

"Then I may not wait?"

She did not reply.

“ Will nothing that I can say alter your decision, Violet ? ”

“ It is impossible that I can give you another answer,” she replied.

“ Then I will go,” said Mr. Maxforth, rising. He was somewhat hurt and offended, as well as humbled, and he would not wait for Mrs. Vaveley’s return. He shook hands with Violet, and left the house. When he was gone she fainted, and, falling, lay cold as a stone upon the floor. The servant-maid ran in and found her thus, and, uttering many cries of alarm and sympathy, was endeavouring to restore her to animation when Mrs. Vaveley entered the house and flew to her daughter with an exclamation of terror. At length Violet revived, and was able to sit up. Her mother did not ask her any question for some time, for she saw the girl was too ill and weak to be interrogated. She caressed her, and was silent. After an interval, however, Mrs. Vaveley again kissed her, and said softly :

“ You have refused him, dear ?”

“ Yes, mamma.”

No more was said just then, but when Violet was about to go to her bedroom that night she kissed her mother, and said :

“ I want you to make me a promise, mamma.”

“ Well, darling, what is it ?”

“ You will be writing to Kitty to-morrow, I think ?”

“ Yes, dear,” replied her mother, looking at her seriously, and awaiting her request.

“ You will not mention it to her, mamma ?”

“ You mean the fact that you have refused him, darling ? No, I will not mention it if you wish me not to do so.”

“ But you will not name that he has been here at all ? Promise me, mamma,” pleaded Violet, looking beseechingly into her mother’s eyes.

“ I promise, darling ; but why are you so particular about that ?”

“ Because it would cause her distress.”

“ Well, dear, so it would.”

“ And then she would not rest until

they have left Oxbury if she knew about this."

"But that would make no difference to you?"

"No difference at all, mamma; but it is best she should not know anything about it, and then they can go on battling with their difficulties, as they wish to do, until they have overcome them and can live with their people in peace. That is what Philip wishes to do."

"You are right, darling; we will keep the matter from them. Good-night, my pet."

Meanwhile Mr. Maxforth had returned to the Seven Stars in some dudgeon and much sorrow of heart. He had failed—failed miserably, and the sooner he got away from Sestwick the better, he thought. He would have left the place at once, but there was no train until the morning. He spent another sleepless night, therefore, in the bleak bedroom, listening to the wailing of the winds and the thundering of the waves, and wondering how any sane per-

son could endure a whole winter in such a wild and wretched village. He rose very early, took a hasty breakfast, and waited in a state of feverish impatience until the ramshackle car came to bear him to the railway station. When it arrived, he jumped in with alacrity, and the last objects upon which his eye rested as it left the sea-shore were the lifeboat-shed and, in the blue distance across the bay, the smoke from the furnace-fires of Eskham.

## CHAPTER X.

## A CASTING VOTE.

MANY grave and anxious faces were seen at Grange Street on the following Sunday morning. The church-members having been invited to remain after the close of the service, they assembled in obedience to the summons in the vestry, and there, under the presidency of the pastor, proceeded, not to elect Mr. Gloss's successor, but to despatch certain preliminary business. It was then and there resolved that a new deacon should be chosen at the next regular church meeting; that he should serve for the space of three months only, and that the election should be by ballot. A very few minutes sufficed for the passing of these

resolutions, and then the grave and anxious faces vanished from the room for a time, to reappear when the great contest should be decided.

One thing was clear—namely, that the opposition party were not of one mind as to who was the most fit and proper person to fill the vacant office. Some favoured one candidate, others another; indeed, the party was divided into three camps. Nor was there any personage amongst them whose influence was sufficient to induce them to unite; as in the days of the Judges, each man did what was right in his own eyes. Perhaps, too, there were some so confident of victory—so sure that Garrel would not be elected, that they did not see any necessity for uniting in order to keep him out.

But, on the other hand, there were some of Mr. Holland's staunch friends who were unwilling to vote for the brewer. This the minister speedily discovered when he came to converse with his people privately upon the subject. Garrel's occupation was the

stumbling-block in the way. Finding it impossible to overcome their scruples, Mr. Holland was obliged to leave them to follow their own devices, receiving, however, the consolatory assurance that, inasmuch as they did not mean to vote for any of the other candidates, they intended to keep away from the meeting altogether.

“I wish I was out of it, sir,” said Garrel to the minister one day, referring to his business. “It brings me into society that is not good for me, and sadly interferes with my usefulness. But still, I must make the best of it, I suppose.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Holland; “I don’t know what else to advise.”

“I can honestly say,” continued the brewer, “that I feel unworthy to occupy the post Mr. Gloss has vacated; but at the same time, should I be called to do so, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be of service to you, sir, and to the cause of Grange Street. As I told Albert Winstock, that night I was at his house, I will stand by you always.”

Garrel had already given the minister an account of his interview with Albert Winstock, and of the reception which that young gentleman and Mr. Staggers had accorded to the pacific proposal the brewer had been commisioned to make to them. The latter had also told Mr. Holland about their offer of a hundred pounds, which the minister had politely declined.

“There is one thing I should like to see, sir,” said Garrel, “and that is a stop put to the scenes we have lately witnessed at our church meetings, for they have been disgraceful.”

“There can hardly be two opinions about that,” said Mr. Holland.

“I mean to say,” continued the brewer, “that a bear-garden couldn’t have been worse; and I don’t believe we shall ever have peace until the parties who make the disturbances are got rid of.”

“We should find that a delicate business, and one of no little difficulty, I’m afraid,” said the minister.

“I know it, sir; and our worthy deacon,

Mr. Flint, would be the first to oppose the attempt. But the idea I suggested a month or two ago will meet the case, I fancy."

" You refer to the motion you gave notice of at the last church meeting, I suppose ?" remarked Philip.

" Yes, sir ; I do. The case stands thus : A number of our members absent themselves from the ordinance month after month. Still, they regularly attend our church meetings, in order to raise obstructions and create confusion."

" That is true," said Mr. Holland.

" We must make a rule, therefore," continued Garrel, " fixing a period at which any members so withdrawing themselves shall have their names struck off the book."

" I think you fixed it at six months, originally ?" the minister remarked.

" I did ; but Mr. Flint and others, you remember, raised an objection to that, and said the time was not long enough ; so, to meet their views, and to ensure the passing of the measure, I have consented to say twelve months."

“ And that motion you are to make at the next church meeting ?”

“ If you please.”

“ Certainly, Mr. Garrel, by all means,” returned Philip cheerfully. “ You will have an opportunity of bringing it forward early in the evening, before we proceed to the election of a new deacon ; and I have no doubt it will be carried.”

In the course of that week all parties were busily employed in looking up supporters for their respective candidates ; and, with a few exceptions, all were desirous that the coming business should be transacted with decorum. No one could pretend to say what would be the issue of the impending struggle : but that every member at Grange Street was excited and anxious ; that the election would be followed by important consequences, either for good or evil ; and that the best energies of the friends of the cause ought to be put forth—these were points upon which there could be no dispute.

And now the long-looked-for night had

at length arrived. Passing across the garden, over the snow, which had been falling heavily throughout the day, Mr. Holland unlocked the vestry door, and stepped into the schoolroom, as the clock in the neighbouring church tower was striking seven. When he took his seat at the table there were only nine members present. This was not surprising however ; for, unhappily, the Grange Street people were never exemplary in the matter of punctuality, and, moreover, the opening business of the meeting would not be of an especially interesting character. In a few minutes the number was certain to be more than trebled.

The minister shook hands with Mr. Flint, who was already at his post, and who seemed nervous and embarrassed. Behind him sat Copperfox, whose eyes were bent on the floor, while his hands were meekly folded upon his breast. Mrs. Copperfox was seated on her husband's left hand, her watchful, eager face turned steadily towards the door. The remaining six persons were scattered upon the benches in different parts

of the room, and were all known to the minister as belonging to Mr. Staggers' faction. At present, therefore, the meeting had not a promising aspect.

A chapter was read, a hymn sung, and then Mr. Flint offered prayer. By this time several more members had come in, the most prominent among them being Snooley and Clatts, whose advent occasioned some little commotion, as the former was believed to have even more supporters than Copperfox, while Clatts would be sure to have a few votes. The minister now read the minutes of the last meeting, and after they had been adopted in the usual way he proceeded to bring before the church the case of a friend who wished to be dismissed to them from another community. This having been satisfactorily disposed of, he then brought forward the case of *another* friend who, having left the neighbourhood, desired to be transferred. This letter, also, was adopted in the ordinary manner, very expeditiously.

At this stage of the proceedings the door

again opened, and a stream of members poured in. First came Mrs. Larberry, closely followed by Amos Flint, who took a seat directly in front of the minister. Behind them came Mrs. Todd and her two daughters. These were succeeded by three or four more persons, the procession being closed by Dame Crock and her husband. The stir and bustle which the entrance of these members caused having subsided, Mr. Holland was again getting up to speak, when Roger Garrel, accompanied by half a dozen members, quietly stepped into the room, and took their seats on his left hand.

“ And now,” said the minister, “ there is another matter to which I have to call your attention. Notice was given at our last meeting of a resolution to be submitted to you by our friend Mr. Garrel. There is no need that I should say anything about it myself, and I therefore at once proceed to call upon our friend to read his motion, and to make such remarks thereupon as he may deem advisable.”

The brewer then rose, and said :

“Dear Pastor and Christian Friends,—The motion I have to submit to you is, ‘That members remaining absent from our communion for the space of twelve months, for any cause whatever except illness, shall no longer be considered members of this church, and their names shall be erased from the list of members in the church-book.’ I think we shall all agree that for a long time past there has not been sufficient discipline among us, and that some rule of this kind is greatly needed. If this resolution has any fault at all, it is that it allows absentees too much grace, if I may use that term. I own that I myself would have preferred to fix the period at six, or even at three months. The motion as it now stands, however, is more likely to meet with general acceptance; and I will only add that I have already privately submitted it to our pastor, and to Mr. Flint, and that it has met with their approval. I beg to propose its adoption.”

“I think,” said Amos Flint, “the resolution is a good one, and I beg to second

it. I do not agree with Brother Garrel, however, that it allows too much time. In my opinion, three months, or even six, would be much too little."

"We ought not," said Copperfox, to "do anybody an injustice."

"Brethren and sisters," said the deacon, "we cannot do better than pass this resolution. I give it my support for this among other reasons—that we are a garden walled around, and we must endeavour to keep the plants from decay."

The motion was then quietly put to the meeting by the young pastor, and carried, as was also another resolution afterwards proposed by Mr. Flint, relating to members living at a distance, but which need not be given, as it had nothing to do with our story.

A deep silence now prevailed, and on every face there gathered the signs of expectancy and disquietude, for all the members were aware that the business in which they were chiefly interested was on the point of being brought forward.

“We have now to proceed,” said Mr. Holland, “to the important work of electing a new deacon. Before I read the passages of Scripture I have selected, or make any remarks upon them, I will call upon our brother Flint, who wishes to make a proposition to you.”

“I beg to propose,” said Mr. Flint, “that the deacon now to be elected serve for the space of three months. I am aware that a resolution to this effect was adopted at the special church meeting; but still I think it is better to pass it to-night as well, so that no mistake may be made.”

“I second that motion,” said Mr. Clatts. On being put to the meeting, it was carried *nem. con.*, and Mr. Flint then distributed voting papers among the members. As soon as he had resumed his seat, the minister read several passages of Scripture bearing upon the work in hand, expounded them, and offered prayer.

Amid profound stillness, each member then wrote upon the slip of paper the name

of the candidate whom he or she wished to be elected, and folded it.

Mr. Flint having collected these folded slips of paper, his cousin said, with assumed dignity :

“ I rise to move that Brethren Garrel and Copperfox be scrutineers.”

This was speedily seconded and carried.

The two scrutineers then retired with the voting papers, in order to examine them in another room; and while they were so employed the company rose to their feet and sang a hymn, which was given out verse by verse by the minister.

It was a time of painful suspense. Listening eagerly for the return of the scrutineers, each member, while lifting up the voice of thanksgiving, felt strangely agitated, as if with an undefined dread. At length the two men re-entered the room. Garrel, his face flushed, and wearing an expression of perplexity and doubt, resumed his seat, while Copperfox advanced to the table. The eyes of the minister and all the members were fastened on the latter

with the view of reading his thoughts, if possible. It occurred to them that Copperfox must be the one elected, as he was the "teller." But there was little to indicate this in his countenance and bearing. The man was inscrutable. He showed no triumph, certainly; but neither did he manifest the least sign of disappointment.

"Brother Copperfox," said the minister, "will you kindly make the church acquainted with the result of the voting?"

The "teller" moved his hands uneasily as they rested upon the table, and, leaning forward, he looked keenly at Mr. Holland, and then round upon the meeting. Every ear was strained to catch his words as he said:

"Christian friends,—I wanted Brother Garrel to make the report to you, but he has requested me to do it instead, and I bow to his wishes. We have examined the voting papers, and the result is as follows:—Neutrals, two. For Brother Garrel, eight."

Here he paused, rubbed his hands to-

gether, and gave another quick look at the minister. Mr. Flint heaved a sigh of relief, his cousin exchanged glances with Snooley and Clatts, while Dame Crock and a few others flushed crimson. All now listened more attentively than ever.

“For myself,” continued Copperfox, “there are five votes, and five also for Brother Clatts.”

So far, then, the brewer had obtained the suffrages of the greatest number. Who could tell but he might get in, after all? It was possible, nay probable, that he would. There was one member whose face at this moment was overspread with a deadly pallor, and that was Snooley. Fixing his gaze upon “the teller,” while his knees literally smote one against the other with intense excitement, he clutched the bench upon which he was seated, as if to keep himself from falling. No one, however, noticed the action, for every eye was turned upon Copperfox. The latter moved his hands to and fro upon the table, and said, nervously :

“ The last name I have to mention is that of Brother Snooley. For him there are eight votes.”

Such was the report of the scrutineers ; and a most unsatisfactory report it was ! It was unsatisfactory because, inasmuch as Garrel and Snooley had obtained an equal number of votes, the election was not over, even now. Such a result as this was entirely unforeseen, and placed all parties, and especially the minister, in an embarrassing and painful position. In what way was the matter to be decided ? To Mr. Holland, who was young and inexperienced, there seemed at that instant only one way of deciding it, and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he at once rose and said :

“ I exceedingly regret, dear friends, that it should now become my duty to give a casting vote. I trust my doing so will not give offence to any one. My decision will not occasion you any surprise, as I have never concealed my opinions and preferences. I give my casting vote for Brother Garrel,

and now declare him elected to fill the office of deacon amongst us. May he be enabled to do so in a manner eminently beneficial to this church and neighbourhood."

## CHAPTER XI.

## COPPERFOX'S DISCOVERY.

Poor Mr. Holland was half-pleased and half-angry with the result of the meeting. He was pleased that Mr. Snooley had not been elected, and he was angry that his friend Garrel had not been chosen without the necessity for the casting vote. Prudence, however, required him to keep his thoughts and feelings to himself, and the only person whom he took into his confidence was his wife. When, on his return home, he related to her the proceedings of the evening—for Kate, although a communicant, was not a church-member, and, therefore, was not privileged to attend the business meetings—the minister made no

secret of his views. Mr. Snooley, he told her, would not have been of any real service to the cause, but rather a hindrance, and therefore the defeat of that young man was matter for thankfulness. The brewer, on the other hand, was certain to work well. The only question with Mr. Holland was, whether his own share in the proceedings of that evening might not be open to blame. Ought he to have given the casting vote at all? Would it not have been better, under the circumstances, to have taken the voting of the church-members over again as between Mr. Garrel and Mr. Snooley? One or the other would in that case have obtained a decisive majority, and his election would have been beyond dispute. It was too late, however, to take that course now; and besides, in the absence of any express rule or precedent with which his memory could furnish him, he was prepared to defend the mode he had adopted, on the ground of expediency. "My opponents," he thought, "will very probably say that Mr. Garrel is not the people's choice, but

mine. Let them say so if they will. I did but exercise what I believed to be my undoubted prerogative, in an emergency which had not been anticipated."

The minister was turning over these thoughts in his mind on the following day, when, happening to raise his eyes to the window, he saw Copperfox, who was the last person he would have expected as a visitor, coming in at the front gate.

"What can bring him here, I wonder?" said Kate, approaching the window at a sign from her husband.

"I haven't the least idea," he replied, "unless it be last night's business."

Since the minister's marriage, neither Mr. Copperfox nor his wife had once entered the chapel-house, although they had frequently been invited to do so. Kate had experienced considerable difficulty in reconciling this fact with Copperfox's assurances of friendship; but so it was.

"Had I better leave the room?" she asked, as the visitor's knock sounded at the outer door.

“By no means. Stay till he asks for a private interview, at any rate.”

With a beating heart Kate resumed her seat, while her husband rose as Copperfox, announced by the maid, entered the room.

Advancing with an insinuating smile, the visitor shook hands, first with Mr. Holland and then with his wife.

The minister placed a chair, and Copperfox sat down.

“You have not been to see us for a long while,” said Mr. Holland, by way of opening the conversation.

“No, sir, I have not; but it is never too late to mend,” replied Copperfox, rubbing his hands vigorously. “We may all mend in time, may we not, Mrs. Holland?” he added, appealing with beaming eyes to Kate.

“Oh! yes; I hope so,” said she, laughing.

This was a promising beginning. It looked as if the visitor had come to make a recantation. At any rate, some such

idea suddenly entered the minds of the minister and his wife. It was a pardonable expectation, when we consider their very slight acquaintance with his character.

Taking some loose papers from his breast-pocket, and drawing his chair nearer to the table, Copperfox said, pleasantly :

“ I have made a discovery, sir.”

His manner was so friendly that it was almost impossible to doubt that he had some welcome news to communicate. Nevertheless, Mr. Holland and Kate experienced a strange sinking of the heart as they heard the words. Their thoughts reverted to the proceedings of the previous night, and it flashed upon them that the discovery, whatever it was, had to do with Mr. Garrel's election, and might invalidate it.

The suspicion proved correct.

“ It is known to you, sir,” continued Copperfox, with a brisk and business-like air, “ that there is a rule in our church which says no member shall vote by proxy.”

He paused, looked keenly at the minister, to note what effect his opening statement produced, and then added, “I am correct, sir; am I not?”

“Well,” replied Mr. Holland, “there has been an understanding amounting to that, certainly, though I have not seen any positive rule in the church-book, nor was there one made last night for the occasion. But let that pass. I believe the church-members were all aware that they could not exercise their electoral rights unless they were present at the meeting.”

“Exactly so, sir,” said Copperfox; “that was what I meant.”

The minister now began to feel uneasy. Till the present moment he had not imagined there was the least irregularity in the voting of any of the members. He had thought that, if there had been any irregularity at all, it was in the matter of the casting vote. “In case they *do* challenge the decision,” he had said to himself, “it will be on that ground.” But here was a new danger.

“ I have found out, sir,” said Copperfox, “ that one of the church-members sent her vote, instead of giving it in person.”

The triumphant tone in which he uttered these words irritated Mr. Holland sorely. There could be no doubt that his visitor had many reasons for wishing to overthrow Garrel’s election, and the minister could quite understand that “ the discovery ” had given him unbounded satisfaction. Copperfox proceeded :

“ I will tell you, sir, how I came to find it out. Mrs. Copperfox and myself, as we sat at breakfast this morning, were talking over last night’s affairs, and I began to call over the names of those that were present at the meeting. I believe, sir, the number present was twenty-seven. Am I right, sir ?”

“ Quite right, Mr. Copperfox ; there were twenty-seven present, besides myself.”

“ That was what I thought, sir ; and you, as chairman, did not vote among the church-members ; you only gave the casting vote ?”

“ No; as you say, I only gave the casting-vote. I omitted to give a previous vote in my capacity as a private member.”

“ Just so, sir. Well, when I came to reckon up the number of votes given, I found there were twenty-eight—one over the number of members present. Here”—continued Copperfox, arranging his slips of paper upon the table, and pointing to each one in turn—“ here we have it—eight votes for Mr. Garrel, eight for Mr. Snooley, five for Mr. Clatts, five for myself, and two neutral; total number of votes, twenty-eight. This made me and Mrs. Copperfox look into the matter a little more closely, and we then discovered that one of the votes had been given by Mrs. Lamb, a church-member who was not present at the meeting. I have just been to see Mrs. Lamb, sir, and she told me I was quite right; she had found at the last minute that she would not be able to attend the meeting, so she had sent her vote by the hands of another church-member.

Poor, simple soul ; she did not mean any harm——”

“ No,” said Kate ; “ I am sure she did not. Mrs. Lamb is a good woman, and did not know that she was breaking the rule, I feel sure.”

Then there was a silence, which seemed almost as if it would never come to an end. At last, Copperfox said to the minister :

“ What had better be done, sir ?”

“ I am not able to answer your question now, Mr. Copperfox, but I shall consult the deacon upon the subject, and we must arrange what steps we ought to take,” he replied cautiously.

“ Yes, sir,” said Copperfox ; “ you will excuse me for having asked the question, but I thought you would consider that this irregular vote has made last night’s election null and void, and that the church must be called together to vote over again.”

“ When I have consulted Mr. Flint,” said the minister, who was well aware that

Copperfox wanted to entrap him, “ I shall be better able than I am now to say what measures it will be advisable to adopt. In the meantime, Mr. Copperfox,” he continued, with a smile, “ let us hope we shall soon find ourselves sailing in smooth water.”

“ I hope we shall, sir. I am sure it is my wish, and Mrs. Copperfox’s too, to do all that lies in our power for our cause at Grange Street.”

“ I am glad to hear it,” said Mr. Holland ; “ but from what I have heard you say at different times, I had concluded that you meant to withdraw from us, and join Mr. Gloss, at Peeble’s Lane.”

“ Oh ! no, sir ; I have no such intention, I assure you. I am too much at home at Grange Street to do that. I have helped them over there with donations, now and then ; but that is all,” said Copperfox briskly.

“ You mean to continue with us, then, do you ?” asked the minister.

“ Yes, sir ; and I shall not mind a twenty-

pound note for the cause, when it is wanted. And as for yourself, sir, when I am talking about you to any one, I always tell them I am your friend—in fact, the best friend you have got."

Copperfox now rose to leave. Having shaken hands with the minister and his wife with many assurances of good-will, he was shown out of the house, bowing and smiling until he reached the front gate.

"Whose horse and trap is that, Philip?" said Mrs. Holland, who was watching the visitor's departure from her station at the window. "See; that one standing in front of the chapel."

Her husband came to the window and looked in the direction indicated.

"It is Copperfox's," he said wonderingly; "and that is his errand-boy that he is giving directions to with so much earnestness."

"He has come to fetch something away from the chapel, you may depend," said Kate, keeping her eyes intently fixed upon their movements. Presently, they beheld

Copperfox and his boy emerging from the edifice, heavily laden with hassocks, cushions, and hymn-books, which they deposited in the vehicle.

“Those are out of his pew,” said Kate. “He is leaving the chapel! Would you have believed it, now, after what he has just been saying?”

As she spoke, Copperfox and his boy mounted the trap and drove away.

“He is disgusted with me for having given the casting vote, I suppose,” said the minister quietly; “and, although he has said nothing about it here to-day, it is probable he will speak his mind pretty plainly at the next church-meeting.”

“Will there have to be another election?” asked Kate anxiously.

“Undoubtedly there will,” replied her husband. “The matter will not rest as it is, now Copperfox has made this unfortunate discovery.” And Philip heaved a little sigh as he went sadly away to his study.

## CHAPTER XII.

## MR. GARREL IS UNSEATED.

THE next day was Sunday, which was begun and ended, notwithstanding the agitation in men's minds, with the decorum and solemnity befitting its character. As for the questions relating to the diaconate, they were for the present kept in abeyance, although there was, perhaps, hardly a single person at Grange Street who had not by this time heard of Copperfox's discovery, and of the difficulties to which it gave rise. The only public acknowledgment of those difficulties was this—a meeting of the church-members (summoned from the pulpit by the pastor) was held at the close of the morning service, when it was proposed

by Mr. Flint and seconded by Roger Garrel, "That a special church-meeting be held on Friday evening next, at eight o'clock." Everybody knew why that special church-meeting was to be held.

And now, the trumpet having been sounded, all parties prepared themselves for the battle. The minister's friends, whom we will designate "the party of order," began to collect their forces for the purpose of securing Garrel's re-election, while the rest of the church-members were just as resolute, if not more so, in their determination to unseat him. Already it was pretty clear that at the coming meeting the brewer would have a great many more supporters than he had found on the previous Friday; but on the other hand, it was just as evident that the opposing factions, having learnt wisdom by their late defeat, did not mean to distribute their votes as they had done on that occasion, but intended to combine them in favour of one of their candidates alone. The person on whose behalf they intended to unite their

suffrages was Mr. Snooley. Forgetting all minor differences in their common purpose of worrying Mr. Holland, and somewhat indifferent, it may be, as to the suitability of their nominee for the office they intended him to fill, the malcontents were making prodigious efforts to secure his triumph, merely that he might prove a thorn in the minister's side. If, in the excitement of the hour, any of them did imagine Mr. Snooley to be every way qualified, they were destined to be undeceived afterwards. For the present, the cry passing through their ranks was, "Throw Mr. Garrel out at all hazards. Take care not to scatter your votes; give them all to Mr. Snooley!"

We will pass over the intervening time, and bringing the reader at once to the eventful night, ask him or her to enter with us the large "vestry" in which the election is to take place. It is a long, narrow room, and the walls are stained and dirty. A table, upon which a reading-desk has been set, stands near the fire, and in front of it sits Mr. Holland, who, with a composed

countenance, is selecting a hymn where-with to commence the business of the meeting. The vestry is filling past. No one, observing the strange stillness which prevails, and the expectant, eager countenances of these men and women, can for a moment doubt that this is an extraordinary occasion, and one for which serious preparation has been made.

The minister raised his head and cast a rapid glance around. He was looking for Garrel. The brewer, if he came, would be certain to be attacked by Snooley's party, but surely he had courage enough to face them? Moreover, Mr. Holland had made himself doubly obnoxious to that party by espousing Garrel's cause, and by giving the casting vote in his favour. Surely the brewer would not fail to give him his support, now that he was to make his defence for doing so? Garrel, however, was not present, and we may as well say at once that for some reason or other, he did not put in an appearance at all that night. The minister, therefore, would

have to fight his battle alone ; for, as his eye glanced over the assembly, although he saw many friends, he saw none sufficiently gifted to make a speech in his favour, especially before such a formidable opposition, and upon so difficult a subject—a subject, however, upon which men like Amos Flint and Mr. Gloss were likely to make many plausible remarks.

Nevertheless, Mr. Holland was by no means certain to be defeated. If Snooley's faction had the advantage in speaking power, yet it was doubtful whether they could command more votes. As far as numbers were concerned, the two parties seemed evenly balanced, and it was difficult to say which would eventually preponderate.

On the minister's left hand sat Larberry, his thin lips tightly compressed, and his restless eyes lighted up with enthusiasm. Dame Crock sat behind him, having Mrs. Larberry on her right hand, and her own husband, whose mild, humble face towered above the company, on her left. About a

dozen more friends were in different parts of the room, all presenting a resolute bearing.

The dissident members had mustered in unusual force. Besides Mr. Flint, Copperfox, and others, whose presence might always be looked for, there were Snooley, Clatts, and McGowan, who sat whispering together in a corner; next to them, Mrs. Copperfox, Mrs. Todd, and her two daughters, Mr. Gloss, and Amos Flint. This last individual, having declared to Mary Gray his determination to make the minister's seat an uneasy one, was meditating on the best means of securing his object. "Mr. Holland is in a hornet's nest," he thought, "and if I can sting him more than the rest, I will."

This was the position of the parties, when the battle-royal commenced.

"Brethren and sisters," said the minister, rising when the meeting had been opened in the usual way, "the circumstance which has called us together may be stated in two or three words. On the morning after the

election of a new deacon had taken place, it was discovered that one of the votes had been given by proxy. That being so, and considering other peculiar features that had marked the election, it has been deemed advisable to take the voting of the church over again. I need not dwell upon the solemnity and importance of this occasion. Let us proceed to the business of the evening with a sincere desire to elect the man most fitted to do good in the sphere to which you will call him."

Upon this, Mr. Gloss stood up, and spoke as follows :

"Mr. Chairman and Christian friends,— I was not present at the last church meeting, and did not hear of what had been done until two or three days afterwards. I was very much surprised when I was told the way in which the matter had been decided—I mean by the chairman giving his casting vote. In my opinion that ought not to have been done. I very much regret that Brother Snooley was not elected. When I resigned my office as

deacon, to which you called me some years ago, I was in hopes that some one would be found much more competent than myself to discharge its important duties. That person, I trust, will be chosen to-night."

When the ex-deacon had resumed his seat, McGowan followed in the same strain.

"The course taken at the last church meeting," said he, "was ridiculous. I am accustomed to read the newspapers every day, and have taken particular notice of the manner in which the Parliamentary debates are conducted, and I have observed that in all cases similar to the one now in question, the voting has been taken over again. No doubt it suited the interests of some parties," he added, with a glance at the serene countenance of the minister, "to follow a different course last Friday night, but such a course was irregular and in every way unjustifiable."

"Brother McGowan is not the only one who reads the debates in Parliament,"

said Larberry, with some warmth. "I have done so myself for more than thirty years past—a longer period, I fancy, than brother McGowan has been in existence—and I do not consider there was anything irregular in our pastor giving the casting vote. We must bear in mind," continued the ironmonger, whose impulsiveness sometimes caused him to make imprudent remarks—"we must bear in mind that several persons voted last Friday evening who had no moral right to be present at the church meeting at all, and who cannot in equity claim to have a voice in our affairs. Subtract those who prove themselves enemies to our pastor and to our cause, and who ought to have been expelled months ago, and you leave an overwhelming majority in favour of Brother Garrel. Mr. Holland, in my judgment, did quite right in acting as he did."

Larberry's injudicious championship here caused a passage of arms between McGowan, Copperfox, and Mr. Gloss on the one hand, and several of the minister's

supporters on the other ; and had it not been for the mediation of Mr. Holland and the deacon, this “ war of words” might have continued until midnight. After sundry explanations had been mutually given and received, Amos Flint rose and said :

“ Brethren and sisters,—I think all right-minded persons, and such as have any judgment and understanding, must agree in condemning the mode in which the election was decided last Friday evening. By giving the casting vote, Mr. Holland prevented the church from arriving at an unmistakable expression of its opinion as to who is a fit and proper person to fill the office of deacon among us. Had the voting been taken over again, the opinion of the meeting would have been found to be in direct opposition to that of the chairman.”

“ That,” said Larberry, “ is a matter of opinion, and I totally differ from you.”

“ Anyway,” said Copperfox, “ we can see that the church has been thrown into

great confusion in consequence of that casting vote, and I for one think it is high time we inquired into the reasons of these things."

Hereupon the minister rose, and entered upon his defence. He spoke for some twenty minutes, and, while he carefully avoided giving unnecessary pain, and adopted a conciliatory mode of address throughout, he laid before the meeting all the circumstances of the case, and attempted to show that he had acted with the best intentions, although he must "confess to much inexperience in technical details." In conclusion, he said he was willing to accept the decision of the church, whatever that decision might be, and would work with whomsoever they thought fit to elect.

When he sat down, Reuben Crock, who had shown many signs of impatience and disgust during the meeting, especially at the observations of Mr. Copperfox and Amos Flint, now reared his massive form on high, and said, simply :

“ I be quite satisfied with our minister myself, and I should think no reasonable man will utter another word about the castin’ vote after the explanation he has given. Let there be no more bitin’ and snarlin’—it is not seemly; and may the good Lord help us all to examine our own hearts.”

“ We had better proceed,” said Mr. Flint, “ to take the sense of the meeting. It is no use wasting any more words.”

“ I quite concur with that remark,” said his cousin Amos, “ and therefore I rise to submit a resolution. I propose that the voting be now taken over again, and that the deacon about to be elected serve for the space of three months, dating from the second day of March next.”

This motion having been solemnly seconded and carried, Mr. Flint proceeded to distribute the voting papers. When he had done so, Mr. Gloss said, in a smooth voice :

“ I propose that Brethren Larberry and

McGowan assist Brother Copperfox as scrutineers."

This resolution also was seconded and carried, and then, amid profound silence, the members wrote upon their respective slips of paper the name of the candidate they wished to be elected. These voting papers were collected by Mr. Flint and handed to the scrutineers, who took them into the outer room to examine them, the church-members singing a hymn in the meantime.

Presently Copperfox appeared at the door; then, followed by the two other scrutineers, he advanced to the table, upon which he leaned as he declared the result of the voting.

"Brethren and sisters," he said, "we have carefully looked over the slips of paper, on which you have recorded your wishes, and we find that for our Brother Snooley there are twenty votes."

Here he paused and coughed gently behind his hand.

"In addition to these," proceeded Cop-

perfox, “three of the voting papers were neutral. Lastly, fifteen votes were given to Brother Garrel.”

Thus the opposition had triumphed. The minister, in declaring Mr. Snooley duly elected to serve for three months, added the customary words, and then the meeting came to a close. It was useless to complain or to regret the result. All that remained was that Mr. Holland should make the best of it, which he inwardly resolved to do.

“I wonder,” he said to himself, “how my difficulties will end?”

## CHAPTER XIII.

“DID YOU SAY IT?”

THE reader will perhaps recollect that Mr. Gloss, on his retirement from office, was to receive a “testimonial” from certain of the teachers and other friends, which testimonial was to be presented to him in their name by Mr. Holland. The troubles and anxieties of the past week had caused the minister to forget the circumstance; but on the Sunday following Mr. Snooley’s election to the diaconate, he remembered it, and that this was the very day on which he was to fulfil his engagement. It will be readily understood that Mr. Holland had no special liking for the ex-deacon, who had been hostile to him ever since his marriage;

nevertheless he apparently did not see that that need hinder him from presenting the testimonial, since he had been asked to do so. His position rendered him, he thought, the fittest person to undertake the ceremony, and a refusal on his part would perhaps have been made by his enemies the occasion of numberless unfriendly comments, and probably would have increased the bitterness of their opposition tenfold. No doubt Mr. Gloss had been a useful superintendent, and if his friends thought that his services deserved this public recognition, why he (the minister) was not unwilling to tell him so.

Precisely at half-past two that afternoon Mr. Holland crossed the garden and entered the chapel, where he found the "Sunday-school children" already assembled with their teachers. Mr. Flint and Mr. Gloss were talking confidentially together in one of the aisles, but separated at his approach, and gave their undivided attention to a number of unruly lads who were making a disturbance in the front pew.

The minister stepped upon the platform and took his seat in front of the table, whereon was placed the “testimonial,” consisting of a number of volumes comprising “Henry’s Commentary,” “The Land and the Book,” and other works. Presently, Mr. Flint came and seated himself at his left hand, while Mr. Gloss took a chair on his right, and the service commenced. In due time Mr. Holland quietly rose to deliver his address. The first part of it was of a general character, and therefore afforded nothing to which any of the listeners could take exception; but when he came to speak of special matters bearing upon the occasion, the case was altered. The minister having by this time warmed to his work, had apparently forgotten all the unpleasant incidents of the past six or eight months, and, remembering only the fact that Mr. Gloss had after all been an indefatigable superintendent, he imprudently declared that, whatever some persons might think, he did *not* rejoice and exult because Mr. Gloss’s services in that

capacity had terminated. This remark was received with an incredulous smile by two or three of his hearers, who considered themselves too sagacious to be "taken in" by anything of that kind. The minister did not notice these smiles, nor did he observe another circumstance which, though apparently trivial, was afterwards productive of very serious consequences. The circumstance was this: Among the hearers, and sitting a little apart from the rest of the congregation, was Mr. Copperfox. His wife and niece sat beside him, and in the pew immediately in front were three young people, one of whom was a church-member named Ruth Barnes. Now, while Mr. Holland was speaking, Copperfox was leaning forward to listen, so that his lips were close to Ruth Barnes' shoulder. At this moment the young woman gave a little start, and was observed to become agitated. As these signs of emotion speedily disappeared, however, and were of a slight nature, a spectator might readily have concluded that his imagination had "played

him false.” As we have said, Mr. Holland did not notice the circumstance at all.

One day soon afterwards, as he was walking down High Street, having just left the bedside of a person who lay dangerously ill, he was encountered by Ruth Barnes’ mother. The poor woman stopped him, and it was evident she had something to communicate. What she told him was this: that Mr. Copperfox, in her daughter’s hearing, had made use of a “dreadful expression” when the minister was speaking on the previous Sunday, for he had said, “That is a lie!” the expression having immediate reference to Mr. Holland’s declaration that he did not rejoice on account of the ex-deacon’s retirement from his post as superintendent. Her daughter, she said, declared that she had heard that expression repeated by Mr. Copperfox no less than three times. Furthermore, the report that it had been used had reached the ears of Mr. Garrel, who had intimated his intention of bringing the matter before the church at its next meeting.

Here, then, was a new trouble, and one that threatened to be of a very serious nature. Sooth to say, the minister's heart was full of forebodings when he knocked, that afternoon, at the door of Roger Garrel's house.

"What is this you have heard about Mr. Copperfox?" said he wearily, as he seated himself in front of the brewer.

"That he gave you the lie," answered Garrel, with great energy; "that he did so in the house of God, during public worship, and loud enough to be heard by one, if not more, that sat near to him. If this sort of thing is not checked, sir, we shall get to such a pitch that it will be intolerable. Liberty of speech, forsooth! I call it licentiouness. It must be put down with a strong hand!"

"Does Mr. Copperfox admit that he made use of those words?" asked Mr. Holland anxiously.

"I don't know," replied the brewer candidly, "for I have not seen him, and I am not aware that any one has taxed him with

it; but,” he continued with a resolute air, “I shall bring the subject forward at the next church meeting.”

“Wouldn’t it be as well, don’t you think,” suggested Mr. Holland, “to see him about it privately, first? There ~~may~~ have been some mistake, you know, which could be rectified without the necessity for a public investigation.”

“That is true,” said Garrel, looking thoughtfully upon the floor.

“Suppose I send him a note, then,” said the minister, “to prepare him for a call to-morrow evening.”

“Do so, sir; and, with your permission, I will accompany you when you go to see him.”

“Very well. You don’t think he will object to your doing so?” asked Mr. Holland, who was aware that there existed a feud of long standing between the two men.

“I don’t see why he should,” replied the brewer. “I am your informant, you know, and the one who has taken the matter up. I wish to go for my own satisfaction.”

"I will call for you, then," said the minister politely.

"Thank you. You see, sir," continued Garrel confidentially, as his visitor was leaving the house, "I haven't taken this matter up *because the accused party happens to be Mr. Copperfox*. I am not one to retaliate. I should have done the same, let the guilty party be who he might."

The note was despatched that afternoon, and on the following evening Roger Garrel and the minister proceeded to the house of the accused. The door was opened by Mrs. Copperfox, whose visage, as she confronted them, was black and electrical. She seemed on the point of denying admission to Garrel, if not to both of them ; but ere she could summon resolution to do so, they had made good their position upon the door-mat, and the brewer, with the utmost urbanity, said they wished to speak to her husband. Very reluctantly they were permitted to enter the inner room, where they found Mr. Copperfox seated at a table near the window. He rose, but

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before a word was spoken, his wife turned upon Mr. Holland, and said fiercely :

“ I know not the object of your call, but at any rate, Mr. Garrel being a known enemy of ours, I do not see what right *he* has to be present.”

The brewer was standing at the door, hat in hand, and listened to these words with a quiet smile.

“ I am not your enemy, Mrs. Copperfox,” he said, coming forward a pace or two ; “ and as to my right to be here, I have none, without the permission of the master of this house. If he requires me to leave, I will do so. At the same time I think that when we have explained our business, you will acknowledge that I am perfectly justified in accompanying our pastor on this occasion.”

“ Then tell me what *is* your business ? ” said Copperfox.

The last trace of colour had fled from his cheeks. He was trembling, but he spoke defiantly, like a man brought to bay. So at least Mr. Garrel thought.

“That is soon stated,” said the minister. “We have come in consequence of a report that has reached us, in which you are implicated. I wish to ask you one simple question, and if you will answer it, you shall be relieved of our company at once.”

“I must know what your question is before I say whether I will answer it or not,” said Copperfox, his eyes wandering restlessly, first to his wife, then to Garrel, and then back again to his interlocutor, while his fingers tapped the table nervously.

“Let me bring your mind,” said Mr. Holland, looking at him steadily, “to the event of last Sunday afternoon. A testimonial, you remember, was presented to Mr. Gloss.”

The countenance of Copperfox became more livid than ever, and his lip quivered. These signs were not lost upon the observant brewer, who concluded that the man was guilty, and determined that he would not believe him, though he should deny it.

“You may have noticed,” continued Mr.

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Holland quietly, "that our young friend, Ruth Barnes, sat in front of you on that occasion."

Copperfox nodded, and said, "I remember."

"She declares," the minister continued, "that when I made the remark that I did not rejoice because Mr. Gloss's services had terminated, she overheard you say, '*That is a lie* ;' and that you repeated the expression three times."

Mr. Copperfox forced a smile, and made a gesture of mock astonishment and indignation.

"I simply ask," said Mr. Holland, still looking at him steadily, "did you make use of that expression, or one to that effect?"

"Let *me* say a word," interposed Mrs. Copperfox, with a severe frown. "You have now proclaimed your business—permit me to say that this is no concern of Mr. Garrel's at all. What is he here for?"

"I will tell you, Mrs. Copperfox," said the brewer blandly. "I am the person,

you see, from whom our pastor got the story, and am here to testify as much. I am also a witness, in case further proceedings should prove necessary after this interview."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mrs. Copperfox, with disgust. "I wish I had slammed the door in your face," she added, with a furious motion of her right arm.

"I read the inclination in your eye at the time," said Garrel coolly.

"And what a letter it was to send to me, a church-member," complained Copperfox, producing the epistle that Mr. Holland had sent him on the previous day. "How formal and cold!"

"Never mind the letter just now," pleaded the minister, whose conscience was quite clear on that score, and who knew the man he was dealing with. "Will you kindly answer my question—did you use that expression?"

"Why did not Mr. Flint come with you this evening?" inquired the accused evasively.

“I asked him to do so,” replied Mr. Holland, “and he would have come but for a previous engagement.”

“It is a pretty thing,” cried Copperfox, “to have a charge like this brought against me on the word of a frivolous chit, who is no better than she should be.”

“Remember, you are speaking of a church-member,” said the minister, gravely, “and it cannot serve your purpose to disparage her. Will you answer my question?”

“No! I will not!” said the accused, defiantly. “You are not sent by the church, neither is Mr. Flint with you, and I decline to answer it either one way or the other!”

“Very well,” said Mr. Holland, rising, “then we need not remain any longer. I think we may as well go, Mr. Garrel.”

“If Mr. Copperfox will not tell us whether he used the expression or not, it is idle to prolong the interview,” assented the brewer.

Seeing them moving towards the door,

Mr. Copperfox suddenly changed his tone.

“Stay a minute, sir,” he said, laying his hand on Philip’s arm, “and you, too, Mr. Garrel. Do not leave us like this.”

“We must if you refuse to answer our question,” said the minister.

“But I was excited, sir. There, take a seat, and you too, Mr. Garrel, please?”

When the visitors had done as he requested, Copperfox said, meekly :

“Should I be telling a falsehood, sir, if I were to answer your question after all?” As he spoke he looked keenly, first at the minister and then at Garrel.

“I should say not,” replied Mr. Holland, with some show of contempt.

“And you will not relate to the church what I said in my haste, if I do answer it?” asked Copperfox, addressing both his visitors.

“We do not wish to bring the matter before the church at all, if we can settle it satisfactorily here,” answered the minister, disdainfully.

“Then listen,” said Copperfox; “I solemnly declare that no such language ever passed my lips. Either the girl’s fancy played tricks with her, or she has told a deliberate and malicious falsehood and ought to be expelled from the church. I am innocent, sir, I assure you. I hope I know myself better than to have done anything so exceedingly wrong, considering the time and the place in which we were. Besides, I could never imagine you, sir, to be guilty of speaking an untruth, and you may believe me when I say that I am your true friend—a truer friend than even Mr. Garrel, who now stands before you.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

## AN EXECUTOR'S LETTER.

ON the same day that Copperfox gave his emphatic denial to the charge brought against him by Mrs. Barnes, Mr. Praxton arrived in Oxbury on a visit to the rectory. The Vicar of St. Jude's had borne his disappointment very well, but still he was glad to get away from Scamborough for a time, and to have a change of scene. Miss Vaveley had thought fit to refuse his offer, and until he had become quite reconciled to his failure he would prefer, he thought, to be away from the neighbourhood. Mr. Maxforth's invitation, therefore, had been readily accepted. As yet, Mr. Praxton knew nothing about the Rector's second

visit to Seftwick. He had not learned that his friend also had asked Violet to be his wife, and had likewise been refused. This singular item of intelligence he was made acquainted with on the night of his arrival, when the two ecclesiastics had become loquacious and confidential in the library, after dinner. They were able, consequently, to condole with each other ; and their friendship was thereby consolidated in a highly gratifying manner. The next day was chiefly spent in the work of exploring every corner of the parish church and churchyard and in comparing the various legends relating thereto ; for the Vicar of St. Jude's was a zealous antiquarian, and had a theory of his own regarding the burial-place of the Saxon king, whose body tradition affirms, had been brought from the battle-field and deposited at Oxbury. Mr. Praxton held that tradition was in error in this particular ; the Rector as warmly contended for its credibility. The time therefore passed

very quickly and agreeably with the two clergymen.

One day they drove over to Poppleton Hall, and Mr. Maxforth introduced his friend to the Squire and his two daughters. Happening in the course of conversation, to mention his theory regarding the aforesaid legends, Mr. Praxton was delighted to find that Emily Cornford coincided in his views.

“This is a sensible girl,” thought the Vicar. “More agreeable by far than her sister Arabella.”

A certain barrister from London did not seem to be of this opinion, judging from the marked attentions he paid the younger daughter of the Squire.

After luncheon, the day being particularly bright and warm, they played lawn tennis, Mr. Praxton pairing with Emily, the barrister with Arabella, and the Rector with Mr. Cornford.

Yes, it was quite evident that the Vicar of St. Jude’s was able to bear his disappointment well on the whole.

It cannot be affirmed that Mr. Maxforth was altogether so contented and philosophical. His failure at Seftwick had left a permanent sadness in his heart. He still felt hurt and offended as well as humbled. And yet he admitted in his own mind that Violet's decision had been a just and wise one. Were she to come to Oxbury as mistress of the Rectory all the mischievous consequences would inevitably follow that she had pointed out. He knew he had no right to blame her for refusing his offer, therefore; but still he was sadly mortified and irritated. Nor could he suppose that the objections she had urged were likely to be removed. It was not probable that he himself would ever leave Oxbury, and yet so long as he held his present living his marriage with Violet was impossible. She would never consent to it, he was quite sure. Emily Cornford thought the Rector's manner abstracted and moody that afternoon, and that he did not appear to advantage by the side of the lively and sociable Vicar.

A few day's afterwards Mr. Praxton's visit at the Rectory came to an end, and he returned to Scamborough.

Mr. Maxforth sat at his library-window one evening looking out upon the lawn, and feeling somewhat solitary. Mr. Hartleby was in London, and the Rector was the only inmate of the house except the servants. A letter which he held in his hand from his uncle, stated that the writer was unwell, and Mr. Maxforth pondered mournfully upon the lonely position in which he would be placed should death take from him this his only surviving relative. Seeing Reuben Crock busy among the flowers in the conservatory he walked out to him, thinking to banish his melancholy reflections by a little talk.

“Are you getting on any better at Grange Street now, Reuben,” he asked?

“Well—yes, sir; we be mendin’ a little,” replied the man, touching his cap. “The chapel begins to fill, and we have good times, thank the Lord. But I can’t

say our church meetins is so profitable to our souls as I should like to see them," he added, shaking his head.

" You mean your meetings for business on the week evenings, I suppose ?" said the Rector.

" Yes, sir."

" How often do those meetings occur ?" asked Mr. Maxforth.

" Well, sir, there is regular ones once a month, and often special ones besides."

" And your church-members have the privilege on those occasions of saying what they like, or of adopting any rules they think fit."

" They have, sir."

" Is your minister bound to submit everything to those meetings ?"

" He is, sir."

" And he must be guided in all things and in every detail by the decision of the church-members then assembled ?"

" Yes, sir, he must," said Reuben.

" I should think, if there happens to be a crotchety person present, he can some-

times do a great deal of harm, can he not?"

"He can, sir, I am sorry to say; and, as a rule, our church meetin's is far from edifyin' or refreshin'. I sometimes wish they was done away with, or at least that they did not come so often."

"And have you been having some special meetings lately, Reuben?"

"A good many, sir. I do fear that Mr. Copperfox and Amos Flint get up as many of them as they can for the purpose of talking at the minister, and making a disturbance. I hope I do not judge them wrongfully, but that has long been my opinion."

"Who are your deacons now?"

"Mr. Flint and Mr. Snooley, sir," replied the man.

"*Mr. Snooley* one!"

"Yes, sir; he was chosen for three months on trial."

"Was *he* the best man you could find, Reuben?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Garrel was chosen first;

but it turned out there was something not quite regular in the votin', and then the other side tried all their strength, and they have got Mr. Snooley in."

"In a little while, then, since he was chosen for three months only, you tell me, Reuben, there must be another election? These frequent contests must keep your people in a very unsettled state, and interfere with your spiritual life."

"They do, sir. They takes away all the good we gets on the Sunday, on account of the disagreements that we have."

"With regard to Mr. Holland, Reuben," said the Rector, after a pause, "I hope his salary is paid regularly, and that he is in better circumstances than when I heard last?"

"Well, his money does not come in very regular, sir," replied the man, "and there is very little of it when it does come. If it was not for the presents made him he could not live at all."

"He is greatly to be pitied," said Mr. Maxforth.

“ He is indeed, sir.”

This sentiment of compassion for the minister was very strong in Mr. Maxforth, and it had been steadily increasing since the day when he was first made acquainted with his trials. Not only had he sent many gifts to the chapel-house ; he had also endeavoured to enlist the sympathies of Mr. Hartleby for the schismatical teacher at Grange Street. Mr. Hartleby was a man of considerable means, and the Rector was his heir. Now the latter had sometimes told his uncle, half in jest and half in earnest, that he ought to leave some of his money to Mr. Holland.

“ I have enough already,” he had said, “ and you will leave no other relative behind you ;” but Mr. Hartleby had, of course, scouted the idea as monstrous and absurd.

It should be known that Mr. Maxforth’s income from his living was precisely one hundred and twenty pounds a year, which sum, with twenty pounds added to it, he paid over to Mr. Peake, the curate. With-

out speaking therefore of his other charities, the Rector paid to his assistant, year after year, out of his own pocket, twenty pounds more than he himself received. How much he gave away besides out of his own private means, it is impossible to state; but it was a large sum. It is seldom considered that this is no uncommon case. Happily he was a wealthy man; but there are hundreds of the poor clergy who have to bear a similar burden. Now here is something which will probably surprise those who fancy that clergymen are a wealthy class. Of the 13,300 incumbencies there are :

Under the value of £100 a year .....	1,742
Over       , "      £100 and under £150	2,035
, "      £150       , "      £200	1,796
, "      £200       , "      £300	3,179
Above       , "      £300 .....	4,548

We find, then, that 3777 benefices are of less value than £150 a year. Yet, out of his income, generally already too slender, the incumbent, rector, or vicar has to pay a curate to help him. "Is this fair? If the number of soldiers in a regiment were so

increased that more officers were necessary, would the country expect the old officers to pay the new ones out of their own pocket?" Surely the laity should look to this.

The Rector was returning to his library after his talk with Reuben Crock, when the housemaid handed him a telegram which stated that Mr. Hartleby was ill and wished to see him. About two hours afterwards he had arrived at his uncle's residence at Richmond, and was shown in to the bedroom. The appearance of the invalid gave rise to very serious fears. Mr. Hartleby had evidently but a short time to live, but he recognised his nephew with a smile. The attendants withdrew, and they were left alone.

"Clem," said the dying man.

Mr. Maxforth bent over him to catch the words which issued from his lips in gasps.

"The—minister—at—Oxbury—"

He could say no more just then; but, after a pause, he proceeded, in a faint whisper—

“ You—often—spoke—to me—about him.”

“ Yes, uncle,” returned the Rector, bending his ears still closer, and listening eagerly.

“ And—asked—me—to do—something—for him.”

“ I did, uncle.”

“ And I refused,” said Mr. Hartleby, struggling for breath, and looking at the Rector, sorrowfully.

“ He had no claim upon me, of course,” he added after a pause.

“ No, uncle.”

“ And is a schismatic besides,” continued the dying man.

Before Mr. Maxforth could make any response, he continued—

“ That is what I told you when you mentioned the—subject?”

“ I remember, uncle, distinctly.”

“ But, Clem,” said Mr. Hartleby, “ this Mr. ——”

“ Mr. Holland you mean, uncle?”

“ That—is—his—name. He is *very* poor, Clem?”

“ Undoubtedly, uncle.”

“ And they persecute him,” continued the other, gasping fearfully. “ Is it not so?”

“ I fear persecution is not too strong a term, uncle.”

“ I have—thought—about it very often, Clem, since I left you, and to please you I——”

He could say no more for some minutes, but lay panting and exhausted; then he added:

“ To—please—you, Clem, I—have—altered—the—will.”

“ God bless you, uncle.”

“ A little, only,” continued the dying man. “ I—have—left—him a small sum, *to please you, Clem!*” Then after another interval, he asked suddenly:

“ Do you—remember—the talk we had—upon the lawn—one summer’s evening—nearly a year ago—about poor—Talbot?”

“ I recollect it perfectly, uncle,” sobbed the Rector, falling down upon his knees in an agony of sorrow and awe; as he noticed the change in the face of the speaker.

“Clem, I—am—thankful—that I never  
—believed—the—philosophers.”

They were the last words his uncle spoke, and about an hour afterwards the good man passed away.

In due time Mr. Hartleby's executor wrote the following letter to the minister of Grange Street chapel :

“DEAR SIR,

“I am directed under the will of a gentleman, lately deceased, to forward to you, half-yearly, the sum of fifty pounds. It was the testator's wish that his name should not be divulged, at any rate for the present; but I am authorised to state that, though he has never met you, he has been made acquainted with the trying circumstances in which you are placed with your people, and that he has reason to believe you have behaved on the whole in an admirable manner. He is aware that your means are greatly straitened, and has therefore set apart a certain sum, which I hold in trust for you, that you may thereby

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be enabled to meet your pecuniary difficulties. I enclose five £10 half-notes, an acknowledgment of which, directed to 'L. F. H., Post Office, St. Martin's-le-Grand, London,' will greatly oblige. The corresponding halves will be sent immediately.

“ Believe me,

“ Dear sir,

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ L. F. H.”

The above letter was registered and posted at St. Martin's-le-Grand.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A PRIVATE INQUIRY.

WE must now return to the accusation that had been brought against Mr. Copperfox, and describe the proceedings to which it gave rise. To Mr. Holland the episode was irritating, for it was another element of disturbance to his people. The minister had thought his troubles were coming to an end, and that he was about to touch the borders of the land of promise ; but this incident opened up another stage of his wearisome journey. Rest and peace for Grange Street were again put in the remote future. Who could possibly foresee what mischief might result from the strife that was now re-kindled ?

It was apparent that there had long been a spirit of rivalry between Mr. Copperfox and the brewer. The two men had taken opposite sides on most of the questions that were brought before the society at Grange Street. In temperament, habits, and tastes they were wide as the poles asunder; and they had come into collision, both privately and publicly, very often. Probably Roger Garrel was not sorry in his heart that an opportunity had presented itself of humbling the pride of his antagonist. But it was a misfortune that the private jealousies of these two church-members should disturb the peace of the whole body. Mr. Holland could not repress a sigh of regret that the dissenting system, with its monthly business meetings, should furnish so many facilities for extending and perpetuating quarrels.

When Roger Garrel and the minister left the house of the accused, after his emphatic denial of the charge, the brewer told Mr. Holland that he entirely disbelieved Copperfox's asseverations, and he also said

he feared the man would now do his worst to procure Ruth Barnes' expulsion from the society.

"Did you notice his manner, sir, throughout the interview?" he asked, as they walked homewards.

"I did," replied the minister.

"You may depend upon it, sir," said Garrel earnestly, "the girl has not told a deliberate and malicious falsehood, nor has her fancy played tricks with her, let him say what he likes. I believe he is guilty."

The minister made no reply to this observation, and he went on :

"You heard what he said, sir: 'The girl ought to be expelled from the church.' Those were his words; and he will have it done unless we prevent him."

Garrel set his teeth hard and clenched his right hand, as he added :

"She will be sacrificed, sir, and he will triumph, if we are not careful. The matter ought not to end here, though, even if he takes no steps. The church must hear about it, and then judge between them."

“I think,” returned Mr. Holland quietly, “before that is done, it would be well to have another preliminary meeting in private. Let us bring Mr. Copperfox and the girl face to face, and let us have the two deacons present. Perhaps by that means we may arrive at the truth. Possibly also some fresh evidence may be obtained.”

“It is not a bad suggestion, sir,” said the brewer musingly. “Let it be as you say.”

“I will see Mr. Flint, then, and Mr. Snooley,” said the minister, “and we will make arrangements for another meeting.”

Mr. Holland fulfilled his promise on the following afternoon, being drawn forward in the affair by the strength of the brewer’s determination.

Now Mr. Flint, who had of late begun to break through his reserve, and was less unfriendly towards his chief, had listened to his narrative with much interest, and, taking the same view of the matter as the minister, at once acceded to the proposal to hold another private inquiry. It was

arranged, therefore, that Mr. Holland and the two deacons, with the brewer, Copperfox, and the accuser, should meet at Mr. Flint's house the next evening, at eight o'clock. An hour or two afterwards the minister happened to encounter Mr. Copperfox in High Street.

"I will not fail to be with you, sir, and with the dear brethren," said Copperfox, when he named the appointment, "and I trust we shall have a profitable season together."

Mr. Holland scarcely knew how to frame a suitable reply to this aspiration, so he simply said, "I hope so too."

"Would you kindly permit me to remark, sir," said Copperfox, whose glance was keen and watchful, though there was much obsequiousness in his manner, "that since I saw you, sir, I have been to Mrs. Barnes' house."

"Oh! indeed," said the minister.

"I went, you know, sir, that I might have a few words with her daughter."

"And did you see her?"

“Yes, sir.”

“What did she say?”

“Why, sir, she told me quite a different story to Mr. Garrel’s.”

Here he paused. Mr. Holland spake not a word, however, but waited for him to proceed.

“At least,” continued Copperfox, “it was not the same story. She says she is not sure I spoke those words, and would not swear she heard them. She owned she might have been mistaken.”

“If that is the case,” said Philip, as they parted, “it is probable we shall be able to settle the matter satisfactorily.”

On that same day, the minister received a call from Roger Garrel.

“I have just been to Mrs. Barnes,” said the brewer briskly, as he seated himself.

“To see Ruth, I suppose,” suggested Mr. Holland.

“Yes. She tells me that Copperfox has been there, and has been talking to her.”

“He told me he had been. I happened to meet him this afternoon,” explained the minister.

“Well,” said Garrel, with a smile of complacency, “I find that the account I heard was quite correct. She repeated to me the statement she had given her mother, and she said she was so confident she heard him say the words, that she could, if necessary, take her oath upon it.”

Mr. Holland then gave him Copperfox’s version of his interview with the girl.

“I should like to know what she really did say to him,” said the brewer thoughtfully. “It would be awkward if she has told two different stories—one to him and another to me.”

“I don’t fancy that she is a girl that could be induced to do that,” said the minister. “I think we shall find the discrepancy capable of an explanation, when we meet to-morrow night.”

“If she *has* been tampered with,” said the brewer, “and has made some damaging admission to him; or if he should be able

to browbeat her, or shake her testimony, it will go hard with the poor girl. I hope she will give her evidence in a becoming manner."

"Yes; and that we shall be able to arrive at the truth, on whichever side it lies," remarked Mr. Holland.

At five minutes to eight on the following evening the minister started for Mr. Flint's house. It was situated at the back of the shop, and the door opened upon a large court or yard. When he arrived at the entrance to the yard, he all but ran against the deacon, who was standing there engaged in conversation with Ruth Barnes.

"I didn't expect to find you outside," said Mr. Holland apologetically, as he shook hands with them.

"I had just come out to look for you and Mr. Garrel, sir," answered Mr. Flint, in some confusion.

"Mr. Garrel has not arrived, then?"

"No, sir."

"Are the others here?"

"Yes, sir; they are in the house, and

waiting to begin. I hope Mr. Garrel will not be long." As he spoke, he was careful not to meet the minister's eye, and from certain other signs it was evident that something was amiss. What could it be? Surely nothing relating to the brewer? Mr. Holland felt quite satisfied upon that point. His faithful ally was, he was sure, still true to the core. Perhaps it was some new device on the part of Copperfox. Revolving these thoughts in his mind, the minister went in search of Garrel. The brewer, however, was not at home. "He left half an hour ago, and said he was going to Mr. Flint's," said his wife. Feeling greatly relieved by this intelligence, Mr. Holland retraced his steps; and when he again arrived at the entrance to the yard, to his great satisfaction he found his friend waiting for him. The deacon in the meantime had disappeared, but the girl was still there, and it appeared as if she and the brewer had been loitering about until Mr. Holland should join them.

"I am glad you have come, sir," said

Garrel, grasping the minister's hand. "I have been to your house, thinking to bring you with me."

"And *I* have been to yours to seek for you," replied Mr. Holland. "I suppose Mr. Flint has already gone in; hadn't we better follow him? They are all there, and waiting for us."

But the brewer hung back and shook his head.

"I am waiting for one of them to *come out* before I enter," said he, planting his feet firmly on the ground.

The minister looked at him inquiringly, and he went on to explain :

"They have one too many in the company," he said emphatically—"one who has no right to be there; and I will not make a party in the proceedings until that person has been sent away."

"You don't mean Mr. Snooley, of course?"

"No; I don't mean Snooley; I mean the dragon."

"The dragon?"

“Yes; the dragon—Mrs. Copperfox! She has come uninvited, and wishes to share in the proceedings; but, I say again, I will not have it.”

“Certainly not,” assented the minister.  
“Have you told them as much?”

“I have; and Mr. Flint is now endeavouring to get the woman to leave.”

The deacon himself came out of the house at this juncture bareheaded, and looking like a man distracted. Approaching Mr. Holland, he said beseechingly:

“My endeavours have not been successful, sir. Will *you* kindly come and use your influence with Mrs. Copperfox?”

“*I* use *my* influence with her!” cried the minister, in amazement.

“If you please, sir.”

“But I have none—not the least in the world!”

“Let me beg you to come and try what you can do, sir. She seems to think she ought to be present, and I have not been able to make her think otherwise.”

“If *you* have not prevailed upon her, I

am sure *I* cannot hope to do so," said Mr. Holland, with a smile.

"But do come in and try," urged Mr. Flint.

Being thus pressed, the minister at length consented.

"I will use what arguments I can with her," he said. "Let us go in, Mr. Garrel."

The brewer, however, still held back, saying resolutely:

"I must keep to my word. You go in, sir, with Mr. Flint and our young friend, and I will follow you when Mrs. Copperfox has gone."

Nevertheless, after some further conversation, he yielded to the minister's wishes, though with some reluctance, and the entire party entered the house.

The first person they saw when the door of the sitting-room was opened, was Mr. Snooley. He was sitting at a small table, having a number of loose papers spread out before him, and an ink-bottle at his elbow, upon which he was gazing with

much gravity. He rose as they entered, and when the minister had saluted him, turning round, the latter saw Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox. They were ensconced in a corner near to the fire ; and when they had returned Mr. Holland's greeting, Mrs. Copperfox settled herself in her chair with an air of determination that promised but slight success to the minister's arguments.

“Take a seat, sir,” said the master of the house, and Mr. Holland sat down, as did Ruth Barnes also, on a similar invitation. Roger Garrel, in the meantime, continued standing at the open door, with his hat in his hand, as if ready to depart on the shortest notice.

“Won’t you take a seat, Mr. Garrel ?” said the deacon, with a shade of anxiety on his countenance.

“No, thank you ; I prefer standing—at least for the present. I propose that Mrs. Copperfox do retire from the room.”

These words were followed by a profound silence. The intruder settled herself still more firmly upon her seat, smiling

grimly, and looking round as if to defy the universe to move her.

“Will Mrs. Copperfox kindly leave the room?” repeated the brewer.

“I have as much business here as yourself,” she retorted, still keeping her seat.

“Not so,” replied Garrel blandly. “I am here by invitation; you are not, ma’am.”

“Let us hear what Mr. Holland has to say upon the subject,” said the deacon, who thought he had better interpose, in order to prevent further dispute.

Thus appealed to, the minister gave his judgment in firm but kind and temperate language, to the effect that Mrs. Copperfox ought to leave the room.

“I shall not do so,” she replied—“at least not till Mr. Flint requests me.”

What was to be done? The deacon did not like to tell her to do so in plain terms, neither did he think it would be seemly for her to remain. He was in a state of dire perplexity, and jerked his elbows about with a vehemence that would have provoked laughter if the occasion had not been so

momentous. Mr. Garrel put on his hat, and moved towards the front door. The minister also rose from his seat.

“I am going,” said the brewer.

“So am I,” said Mr. Holland.

“For goodness’ sake,” cried Mr. Flint, darting after them, “do not do that!”

“Oh, never mind if they do,” said Mr. Snooley; “let us go on with the business without them.”

“That is impossible,” replied Mr. Flint, who was always conscientious; “we cannot do without the minister, and I presume he will not remain without Mr. Garrel.”

“No,” replied Mr. Holland; “it must be either both or neither.”

“Then just wait one moment, and I will arrange it,” said the deacon excitedly. So saying, he rushed upstairs, leaving the company to await his return in silence. When he re-appeared, he said, addressing Mrs. Copperfox:

“My wife is alone upstairs; would you mind going to sit with her? and in case

we should require your evidence we can call you down."

Thus adjured, Mrs. Copperfox rose, walked across the room and ascended the stairs. Mr. Flint carefully closed the door after her, and Roger Garrel having then readily accepted a chair, the inquiry commenced.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## NOT PROVEN.

AFTER the usual formalities, Mr. Holland rose and said :

“ I have been requested by the master of the house to take the chair on this occasion, and to open the business of the meeting with a few observations. With your permission I will make a brief statement of the circumstances which have led to this inquiry. It is within your recollection that a short time ago a certain presentation was made to Mr. Gloss. The presentation was made through me, and I confess I found the duty a somewhat difficult and delicate one, owing to matters which need not be particularised. How-

ever, I did it as well as I was able, and endeavoured to forget whatever had been disagreeable or painful, and to dwell (as I could do in all sincerity) upon his usefulness in that particular department with which we were then concerned" (hear, hear). "I was not aware at the time, nor am I aware at this present moment, that I then said anything I did not honestly mean" (hear). "Well, the ceremony ended in the usual manner, and I left the chapel in the belief that we all thoroughly understood each other, and meant to 'let bygones be bygones.' But, brethren, the Evil One has prevented us, as yet, from having peace and quietness as a community, or from living in harmony one with another. I will tell you what a surprise I encountered. I was walking in the street a day or two afterwards when Mrs. Barnes stopped me, and said she had something of importance to tell me. Her daughter, she said, had overheard Mr. Copperfox making use of the expression 'That is a lie!' with reference to some statement of mine in my address;

and that expression, she said, had been used more than once, being spoken loud enough for those sitting close by to overhear it distinctly. The matter, she said, had been brought before Mr. Garrel; and he, being of opinion that such an expression, used by a church-member in the house of God on the Sunday, and applied to the minister of the chapel, was unbecoming, had declared that it ought to be inquired into. I saw Mr. Garrel, and he stated to me that such was his opinion. Am I correct so far?" asked the minister, appealing to Mr. Garrel.

"Your statements, sir," replied the brewer blandly, "are perfectly correct."

"Well, then, I will proceed. It was arranged that we should call upon Mr. Copperfox, and that we should ask him, in a friendly way, whether or not he had made use of that expression. This course seemed to us the best we could take under the circumstances."

"Undoubtedly it was the best course," said Mr. Flint, moving in his chair uneasily.

“Yes,” said Copperfox, nodding his head and smiling, “that is all right so far.”

“We did so,” continued the minister. “We called upon Mr. Copperfox and we asked him the question.”

Here Mr. Holland paused and considered a moment before he went on. Should he reveal to the company the fact that the accused had at first raised many difficulties and had flatly refused an answer with many insulting remarks; or should he suppress that part of the interview as immaterial and calculated to injure Copperfox by creating a prejudice against him? He decided to pass it over; for he remembered he had given a half promise not to mention it, and besides, it was more charitable to hide the faults of the man.

“We asked the question,” said he, “and Mr. Copperfox denied the charge in the most solemn manner. It then occurred to Mr. Garrel and myself that the whole matter might be explained and perhaps satisfactorily cleared up, if the respective parties were to meet for the purpose of

discussing and investigating the charge in a fair and amicable manner. It seemed good to Mr. Flint, and Mr. Snooley also, that this should be done, and therefore we are met together on the present occasion. And now, brethren, I have stated the circumstances which have led to this inquiry. Let us conduct it in a fair and honourable spirit, and with a sincere desire to arrive at the truth" (hear, hear). "Unfortunately it is possible for us to remember certain things in the past that are not of the most agreeable nature, but we have nothing to do with those things when making this investigation" (hear, hear). "We must try to put from our minds every recollection that might prejudice our judgment; for we are bound to decide this case upon its own merits. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Copperfox will, I hope, acquit me of any intention to do him a deliberate injury. He will not, I trust, regard this inquiry as an act of reprisal?"

Mr. Holland here looked at the accused, who made a gesture of assent.

“I can sincerely state,” said the minister in conclusion, “that it is not an act of reprisal. The course we have taken has been, I think, one of necessity; I for one should have been thankful had there been no occasion for it. We have met here to-night, then, to inquire into this accusation, *not* because we have any ill-feeling against Mr. Copperfox” (hear), “but because this is in our judgment a matter affecting the interests of the whole body.”

This speech was well received, even the accused himself frequently signifying his approval by sundry inarticulate sounds. Mr. Holland’s most determined opponents never charged him with vindictiveness.

Mr. Flint had sat with his eyes tightly closed and his hands clasped upon his knee, listening intently to every word. Roger Garrel had nodded and smiled at intervals, settling himself in his chair as if he meant to be a hearer rather than a speaker. As for Mr. Snooley, he was taking voluminous notes—but then of late people had taken very little notice of Mr.

Snooley. He had not proved quite so efficient a deacon as his supporters had anticipated, and there were those who affirmed he would not be honoured by a re-election.

The minister now addressed himself to Ruth Barnes.

This important witness had so far conducted herself with self-possession and modesty. Sensible of the seriousness as well as novelty of the part she had to take she had kept her eyes fixed upon Mr. Holland, awaiting in silence the time when she was to give her evidence; and now, being requested to speak the truth as to this charge, she began by saying she had "no wish to do Mr. Copperfox an injury; far from it." She was sorry she "had ever spoken about the matter at all." It had not "entered into her mind at the time she told her mother what she had overheard in the chapel," that her words would have led to this inquiry or to any previous one, much less that she would be called upon to take so conspicuous a part in it. Then

she went on to tell how, sitting in a pew with two friends, she distinctly heard Mr. Copperfox make use of the words in question, and repeat them three times. That was, in fact, the whole of her evidence. She gave it in a modest, becoming manner, and with a clearness and consistency which left little, if any, room for doubt that she was speaking the truth, or at any rate giving a truthful account of her own impressions. Garrel seemed greatly pleased with her testimony. As the reader is aware, he had been somewhat anxious upon the subject, and he was now considerably relieved to find the girl adhering so firmly and courageously to the statement she had made from the very beginning. The accused, however, had listened to her with far different feelings.

“May I ask our young friend a few questions?” said Copperfox, addressing the minister when she had concluded her statement.

“Certainly,” he replied.

“I want to know,” said Copperfox, turn-

ing to the girl, “if you remember my calling at your mother’s house the day before yesterday?”

“I remember it perfectly well,” she answered.

“And you remember that I spoke to you upon this matter?”

“I do.”

“And what did you say upon that occasion? Did you not tell me that *you thought I used those words, but were not sure, and couldn’t say positively?*”

“No, Mr. Copperfox, I did not exactly say that.”

“Now, be careful, Miss Barnes—were not those the very words you used?”

“Decidedly not.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. What I said was this, that since you denied it on your solemn word as a Christian, I would not say you spoke falsely; but that, apart from your denial, I felt positive you said it.”

The girl’s quiet but firm demeanour was beginning to tell upon the company.

Nothing daunted, however, Copperfox proceeded with his cross-examination.

“Do you remember my mentioning the name of Mrs. Copperfox to you on that occasion?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Miss Chingford’s?”

“I do, sir.”

“And do you remember that I reminded you they were sitting in the pew with me that Sunday afternoon?”

“I remember it quite well.”

“And that they solemnly declare they heard nothing of the kind?”

“You did tell me so, and I have no reason to doubt your word.”

“This circumstance,” said Mr. Holland, “is of great importance. I, for one, am quite ready to admit that Mrs. Copperfox and Miss Chingford did not hear the alleged expression. Mrs. Copperfox has given her testimony upon this point, in private, repeatedly. I do not think it necessary to call her. We will, if you please, take the fact for granted.”

“ I am quite ready to do so,” said Mr. Flint.

“ And I,” said Garrel.

Mr. Snooley also said something to the same effect. The accused, therefore, was allowed the full benefit of this negative testimony.

“ I said just now,” continued the minister, “ that this circumstance is of great importance. It is so, when coupled with another to which I desire to call your attention. There were two other persons in the same pew with our young friend, and so far as I have ascertained, these also declare that they did not hear the expression attributed to Mr. Copperfox. Am I correct ?”

“ Quite correct, sir,” replied the girl.

“ They did not hear anything of the kind ?”

“ No, sir.”

“ Nor did they observe anything unusual in Mr. Copperfox’s manner ?”

“ Not anything at all, sir.”

“ It is true,” said Mr. Holland, turning to the company, “ we are somewhat irregu-

lar in receiving testimony at second-hand in the manner we are doing; but we wished to keep the matter as private as possible."

"Certainly," assented the brewer. "I am quite satisfied with the manner in which the inquiry is being conducted."

"So are we all," said Mr. Flint.

"I believe," said Garrel, turning to the girl, "that you sat nearest to Mr. Copperfox at the time?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"You were nearer than either of your two friends?"

"I was."

"And nearer than either Miss Chingford or Mrs. Copperfox?"

"Yes."

Here followed a description of the relative positions of the persons occupying the two pews.

"And now," said Mr. Snooley, upon whom Ruth Barnes' evidence had produced a deep impression, so that he believed Copperfox really did make use of

words of some kind or other at the time stated, but who was exceedingly reluctant to believe they were the exact words the girl had given, "I wish to make one suggestion. We are all liable to be deceived, and to take one word for another, especially when they are words bearing similar sounds. This may be a case of that kind. I am inclined to think that our brother Copperfox, so far from wishing to make the slightest imputation upon Mr. Holland, or to make any disrespectful remark, was really at the time struck with the appropriateness and truth of the observations Mr. Holland was making, and audibly expressed his approval by saying, to himself, 'That is right!' This expression, you perceive, bears a similar sound to the one alleged to have been made, 'That is a lie!' Do you not think, Miss Barnes, that the words you heard were, 'That is right?'"

"I am confident," replied the girl quietly, "that they were not. The words I heard were those I have stated."

“ Oh, very well. Then there comes another question,” said Snooley, going upon “another tack.” “ Mr. Holland at the time, I believe, was expressing his sorrow that Grange Street was losing our brother Gloss’s services ?”

“ No; he said——”

“ Well now, never mind. Do you think Mr. Holland *was* sorry, when he said he *was* ?”

“ I do,” replied the girl.

Here Mr. Flint interposed. “ Your question, Mr. Snooley,” he remarked with some show of indignation, “ *was*, I think, unnecessary.”

“ Quite,” assented Garrel, emphatically.

“ Mr. Copperfox,” said the minister, addressing the accused, “ is there anything else you wish to say touching this accusation, before we bring our inquiry to a close ?”

“ No, sir,” he replied.

“ Have you any further questions to ask our young friend Ruth Barnes ?”

“No, sir; none at all.”

Similar replies having been given by Mr. Flint, Roger Garrel, and Snooley, in answer to questions put to them respectively, the minister proceeded to say :

“We are now as well prepared as we can ever expect to be to arrive at some sort of conclusion, and I, for my own part, am in favour of the Scotch verdict of ‘Not Proven.’”

“And in that verdict I quite concur,” said Mr. Flint, “for the charge has not been substantiated, and I think Mr. Copperfox is entitled to the benefit of the doubt.”

“At the same time,” said Garrel, “we wish to add, that the manner in which our young friend Ruth Barnes has given her evidence has afforded us much satisfaction. Her testimony has been clear, consistent, and straightforward.”

“It has,” said Mr. Flint; “but, having been opposed by the simple denial of our brother Copperfox, and not having been supported by the testimony of her two

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companions, we do not consider the case proved against him."

"Just so," assented Garrel.

"Our inquiry, then," said Mr. Holland, "is now at an end."

END, OF VOL. II.

JULY, 1877.

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